

# Arkansas State Capitol Self Guided Tour



John Thurston  
Secretary of State



# JOHN THURSTON

## ARKANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE

Welcome to the Arkansas State Capitol!

I take great pride in the history that embraces this building and find it an extraordinary privilege to be able to share it with you.

One of my most important duties as Secretary of State is maintaining and preserving the rich history of the Arkansas State Capitol.

Since 1911, this building has been the center of Arkansas's state government. In addition to being a beautiful historic landmark, the Capitol is both a handsome structure and a vital working building. It's the official home to six constitutional officers and over 300 civil servants in the Legislative and Executive branches. It is my privilege to serve Arkansas as the Secretary of State.



I hope you enjoy your time at the Arkansas State Capitol. Please feel free to stop by the Capitol Visitor Services Center with any additional questions or comments that you may have. I look forward to you, your family, and friends visiting the Capitol again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of John Thurston in black ink.

John Thurston  
Arkansas Secretary of State



# General Tour Information

Welcome to the Arkansas State Capitol!

We encourage all visitors to sign the guest register at the Capitol Visitor Services Center, as we like to document how far everyone has traveled in coming to visit our beautiful building.

## Click and Share!

Feel free to take photos and capture memories while on your visit. We would love it if you shared images of our State Capitol on your favorite social media site and invited your friends and family to visit us in person!

Remember to tag the Arkansas State Capitol in your post: **#ARStateCapitol**

## Hours & Accessibility

The Capitol Building is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday thru Friday. On weekends and state holidays, the building is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Two public elevators, are located in the east lobby, near the front entrance of the building.

## Tour Option

The Capitol Theater, located near the Visitor Services Center, features continuous informational videos about the construction history of the State Capitol and the notable people, places, and events of Arkansas history.

We hope that you enjoy exploring the Arkansas Capitol with the aid of this self-guided tour booklet or in-person tour guide.

We also offer a self-guided tour of the Capitol's grounds, noted for its seasonal landscaping, grand monuments, and a wide variety of native trees. It is available on our website at [www.sos.arkansas.gov/state-capitol/state-capitol-tour-information](http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/state-capitol/state-capitol-tour-information).



# Capitol Directory

## First Floor (Map on page 4)

Visitor Services Center	Lower Rotunda
Exhibit Cases	North and South Hallways
Great Seal Display	Lower Rotunda
State Land Commissioner	Room 109
Gift Shop	Lower Rotunda
Post Office	Lower Rotunda
Exhibit: Mentors and Models & Testament	North Entry
Restrooms	North and South Ends



## Second Floor (Map on page 6)

Governor's Office	Room 250
Secretary of State's Office	Room 256
State Treasurer's Office	Room 220
State Auditor's Office	Room 230
Lieutenant Governor's Office	Room 270
Governor's Reception Room	North End
Rotunda and Bronze Doors	Center
Old Supreme Courtroom	South End



## Third Floor (Map on page 11)

Senate Chamber	South End
House Chamber	North End
Heerwagen Murals	North and South Stairways
Exhibit: Building Forever	Northwest Corner
Restrooms	South End



## Fourth Floor (Map on page 15)

Senate Gallery South End	
House Gallery North End	
Exhibit: Arkansans at War	Northeast Corner
Exhibit: Arkansans Through the Years, By the Numbers	Southeast Corner
Exhibit: Arkansas State Symbols	Northwest Corner
Exhibit: Rotating Gallery	Southwest Corner



## Lower Level

Photography Exhibit	Elevator Lobby
Exhibit: Seasonal photos	East-central Hallway
500 Grill	West-central Hallway
Restrooms	North and South Ends





# Building the Arkansas State Capitol

Arkansas was still in its infancy as a state in 1842 when the first capitol building was completed. As the new government grew, the building we now know as the Old State House was no longer large enough, and it fell into disrepair. As chunks of plaster began raining down on the Senate floor, legislators debated whether to repair and expand the building or construct an entirely new structure with ample space and modern conveniences.

In 1899, the state's legislators voted to build a new capitol. The site chosen was found about a mile west of the Old State House, a hilltop plot occupied by the due-for-replacement state penitentiary. After the July 4, 1899 groundbreaking ceremony, inmates became builders: prisoner crews leveled the old prison buildings, excavated for foundations, and worked on the new Capitol, all while living on site as late as 1910.

Missouri architect George Mann designed the original plans for the Arkansas State Capitol and oversaw the project until 1909. The work was slow with a series of delays brought on by cost overruns, budget shortfalls, and even charges of bribery. The state eventually replaced Mann with New York-based Cass Gilbert, best known at the time for his designs for the Minnesota State Capitol and New York's landmark Woolworth Building.



State Capitol around 1914

Gilbert acted quickly to remove substandard materials and revise the interior design. Features and materials that were chosen to cut costs were upgraded. Marble for the floors and wall panels came from Vermont, while the grand staircases were carved of Alabama stone. Elegant fluted columns were quarried in Colorado. Hard, lustrous limestone from Batesville, Arkansas, formed the exterior walls, while a softer Indiana limestone was used for the dome.

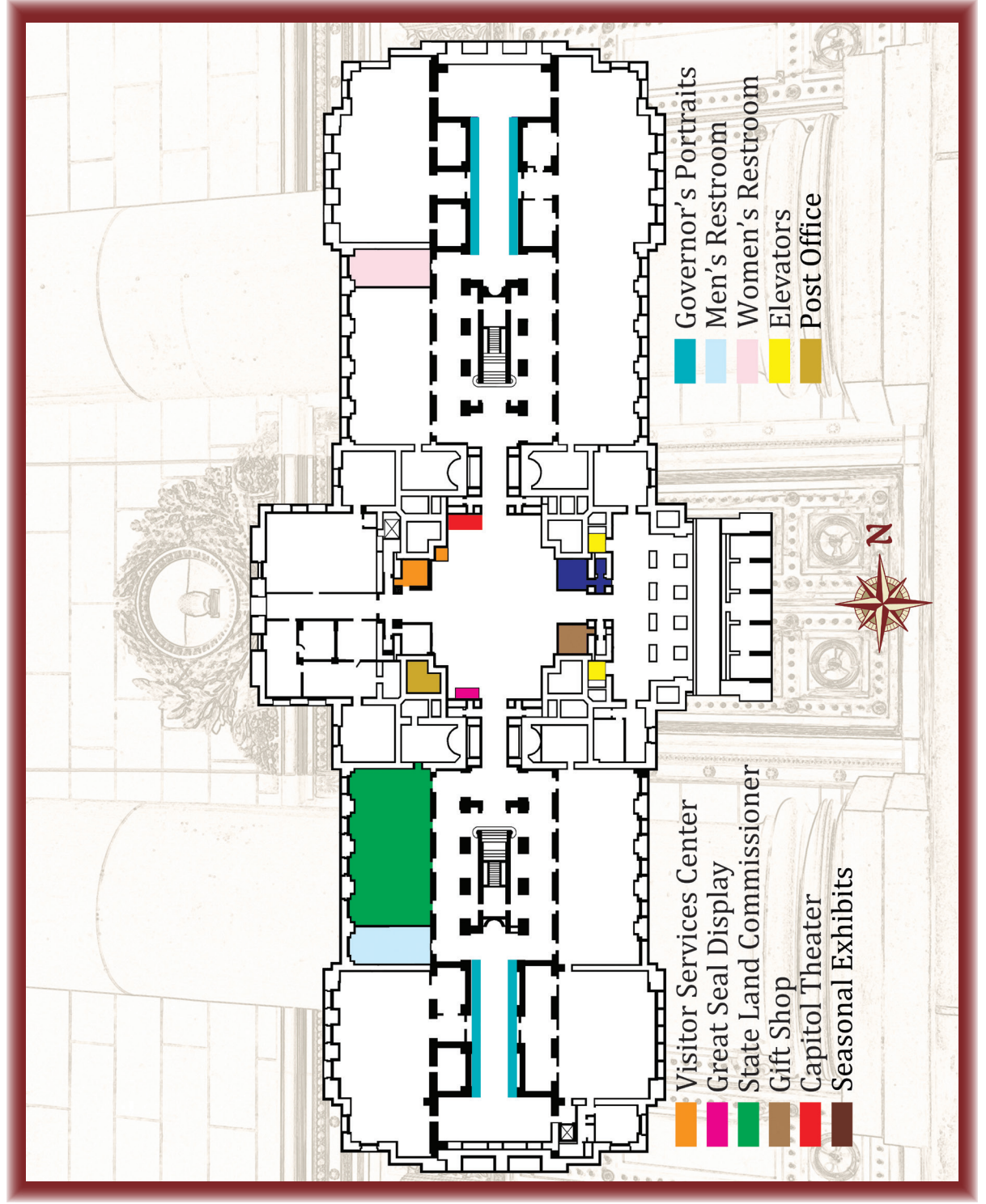
The legislature first met in the unfinished State Capitol in 1911, although it lacked permanent heating, lighting, and many furnishings. The Capitol was not officially declared complete until January 1, 1915. The final cost of the project topped \$2.2 million, surpassing the initial budget of \$1 million.

Today, the neo-classical Arkansas State Capitol looks much as it did in 1915. It measures 440 feet north to south, 196 feet east to west, and covers nearly 287,000 square feet. The distance from ground level to the top of the dome's cupola is 213 feet. Finally, the Capitol is topped by a ball finial that is covered in gold leaf.



State Capitol Today

# First Floor



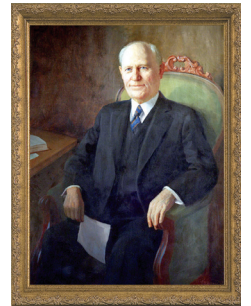
## The First Floor

Begin your tour in the first floor rotunda. Notice the lighted stained-glass rendering of the Great Seal of Arkansas in the southwest corner. Adopted by the state legislature in 1864, the seal includes 16 elements linked to aspects of Arkansas's history and economy. These symbols include the goddess of Liberty, an angel of mercy, and the sword of justice. The eagle holds emblems of both peace and war in its talons. Inside the shield are emblems of the state's 19th century economy, such as steamboat transportation, agriculture, and industry.



### *Governor George Washington Donaghey, 22nd Governor of Arkansas (1909-1913)*

Governor George Washington Donaghey served on the first Capitol Commission (1899-1901) and, in 1908, ran for and won the governor's office, promising voters that he would finish the long-delayed Capitol project. He largely delivered on this promise in his two terms (1909-1913); after leaving office, he chaired the Capitol Commission, overseeing the building's completion. Because of his leading role in completing the Capitol, after political scandals and infighting led to the project being defunded, Donaghey is remembered as the father of the Capitol. In 1911, Donaghey moved his office from The Old State House on Markham Street, becoming the first governor to serve in the "new" Capitol. A diorama of the Capitol is located beneath Governor Donaghey's portrait.



### *Exhibits and Displays*

In the north and south corridors of the first floor, adjacent to the lower rotunda, are displayed portraits of governors who previously served in the Capitol after Donaghey. Four exhibit cases offer changing installations that interpret and celebrate aspects of Arkansas's rich history, culture, and attractions.

### *The Commissioner of State Lands*

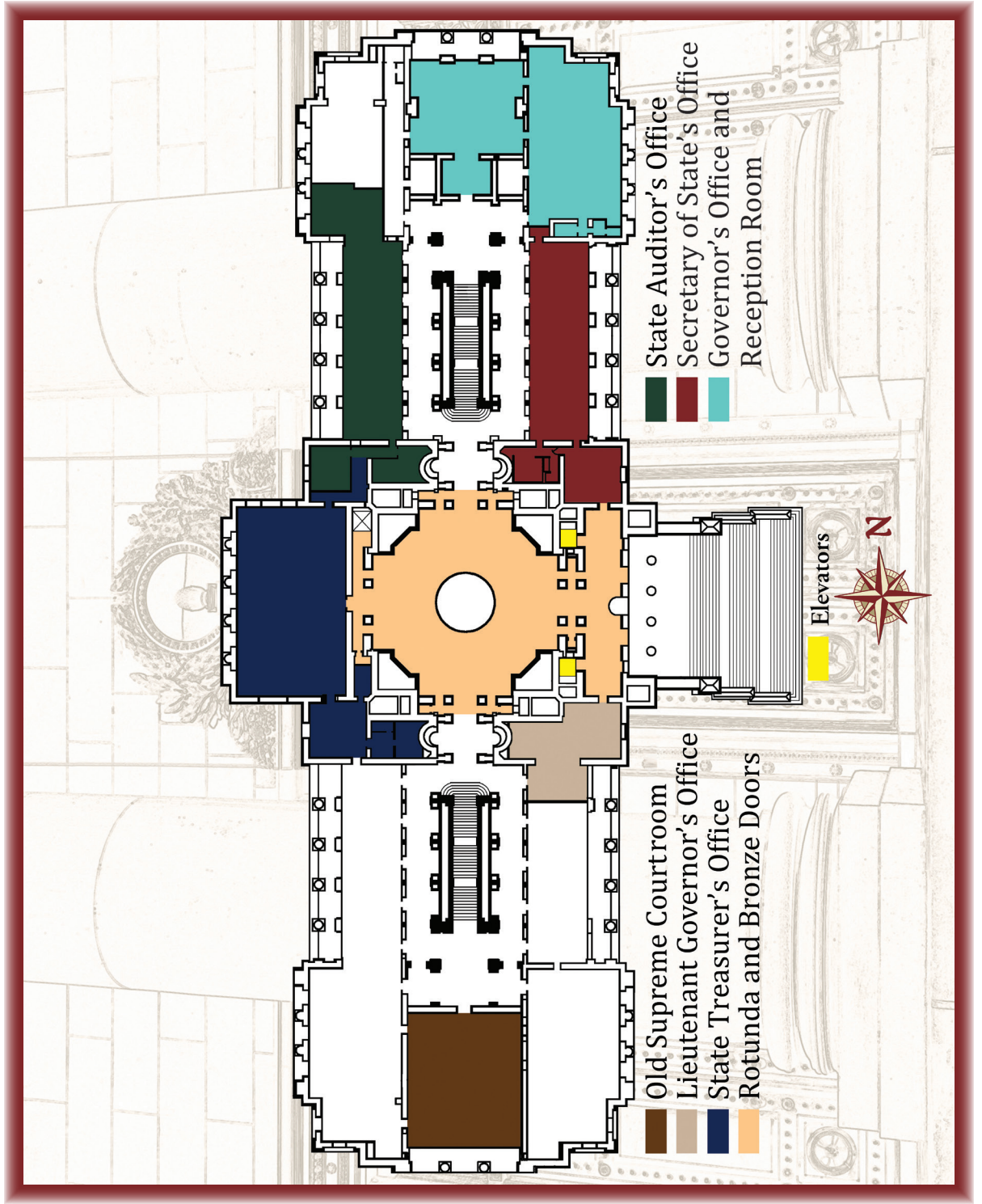
The office of the Commissioner of State Lands dates back to Arkansas's earliest days. During the territorial period, the Land Office administered and recorded the transfer of federal lands to private ownership. Many of those original land records remain in its holdings, such as handwritten field notes and plat maps from the first survey of the Louisiana Purchase, Spanish Land Grants, and Military Bounty Lands from 1812.



In early 2013, the Commissioner of State Lands unveiled its renovated Capitol offices, making many of those records available for public view. Climate-controlled vaults, exhibit space, and research facilities bring artifacts to light, many for the first time in more than a century. The restoration also uncovered beautiful hardwood floors that are original to the Capitol's construction.



# Second Floor



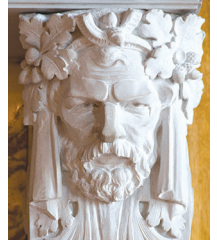
# The Second Floor

## Governor's Reception Room

The Governor's Reception Room is both a public room and the governor's dedicated conference space, used for all staff meetings, press conferences, bill signings, and other public events. Originally decorated with ornate plaster moldings, Cass Gilbert revised the room's decor to reflect the Craftsman style, emphasizing simpler designs, and undisguised natural materials.

The room was restored in 2000. Using technological advances to faithfully replicate the 1914 construction and painting techniques, samples of the original paint layers were analyzed to determine the original colors, paint finishes, and glazing

techniques. The original stenciling was done on muslin applied to the plaster walls, and this process was duplicated. The original parquet floor was too damaged to salvage, but the entire floor has been replicated and installed according to Cass Gilbert's original silverplated specifications. The silver-plated chandelier, candelabras, sconces, and rich quarter-sawn oak paneling are original to the room.



At each end of the room, Batesville limestone mantels and Italian Fleur de Peche marble inserts surround the ornamental fireplaces. The east mantel features carved heads represent the state's historic Native American populations, while the west mantel's carvings call to mind the early European explorers and settlers. The space above the east fireplace displays the portrait of the most recent serving past governor.

While no longer used as the central conference table, the room still displays the original table, crafted of walnut from a tree planted by Donaghey's father on the family's farm in Conway, Arkansas. In 1936, Donaghey presented the table to the Capitol to commemorate the state's 100th birthday.

The north-facing windows offer views of "Testament" (the Little Rock Nine Monument), the Arkansas Bicentennial, and, in the distance, the Arkansas River.

## The Rotunda

This grand central space hosts public meetings, speeches, hearings, and rallies. Portraits of the four past governors featured in the rotunda include one of former Governor Bill Clinton, Arkansas's native son, the 42nd President of the United States.

In 2013, the interior dome underwent a major project to repair plasterwork and return the dome to its original 1914 appearance. The first layers of paint were analyzed to re-create the original colors. In all, 16 shades of paint and decorative glazing were used to highlight ornate molded plaster and recreate finishes lost under century's of overpainting.



### *Decorative Elements*

Suspended from the ceiling by a 73-foot chain, the rotunda chandelier weighs more than 4,000 pounds and is approximately 12 feet in diameter and 18 feet in height. One of several light fixtures fashioned for the Capitol by the Mitchell-Vance Company of New York, this grand, intricate chandelier incorporates over two thousand brass, copper, zinc, iron, and glass parts.

The six 10-foot-tall bronze doors, located on the east sides of the rotunda, were designed by Cass Gilbert and made by New York's Tiffany Studios in 1910 at a cost of \$10,000. In order to keep the uncoated bronze surfaces bright, as the architect intended, the 1,300-pound doors are polished by hand, inside and out, every week.

The east-facing doors were the main public entrance for most of the Capitol's first century. Since September 11, 2001, visitors have entered the Capitol through its ground-level doors and security stations staffed by the State Capitol Police.

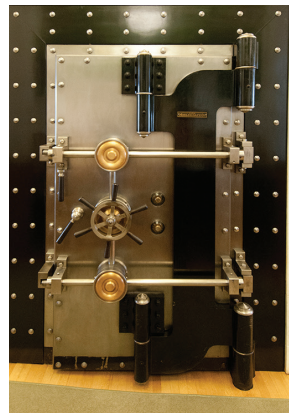




## The State Treasurer's Office

### *The Vault*

The office of the State Treasurer, located on the west side of the Rotunda, contains a vault secured by a series of four doors and three time locks. The 11-ton main vault door presented a stiff challenge to construction crews. The first attempt to move the vault door was by loading it onto animal-drawn wagons. Those wagons quickly sank axle-deep in the mud around the Capitol construction. Ultimately, a rail spur track was laid to the west side of the building to carry the door. It was then hoisted through a hole in the west wall, using blocks, tackle, and a steam winch. The vault holds only small amounts of cash, and its present function is mainly decorative and symbolic.



## Old Supreme Courtroom

The Arkansas Supreme Court met in this room, located at the south end of the Capitol's second floor, from 1912 through 1958. In 1958, due to increased space needs, the Court moved to the new Justice Building located southwest of the Capitol. The former courtroom is now used for legislative committee meetings, lectures, and press conferences.

### *Restoration*

The room's original furnishings include its brass handrails, the mahogany rail, the judicial bench (enlarged in the 1920's to accommodate the court's addition of two justices), light fixtures, ornamental plaster, and the high-backed justices' chairs.

In 1999-2000 the room was restored to its early appearance, which included recreating its 1914 decorative paint finishes and installing period-appropriate chairs and tables, as well as carpet, and drapes that closely resembled the originals. Paint deterioration led to a second restoration in 2018; sophisticated re-analysis of original paint samples



allowed restorers to more faithfully recreate the former courtroom's luster.

Shapes and symbols drawn from classical architectural ornamentation decorate the Courtroom's ceiling and cornices. The latter feature a recurring pattern of triglyphs and three distinct *metopes*, or decorative panels, bearing symbols related to principles of justice and the law.



➤ **Green Shield**

A symbol of defense or watchfulness, a reminder of law's role in protecting society.



➤ **Gray Shield**

A ship's anchor, with a dolphin twined along its shank. The anchor is a traditional representation of safety or sureness, while the dolphin was the fastest known creature of the seas. The two symbols combined create a third one, embodying a favorite maxim of the Emperor Augustus: *Festina Lente*, or "Make haste, slowly"—a reminder that good justice should be both swift and sure.



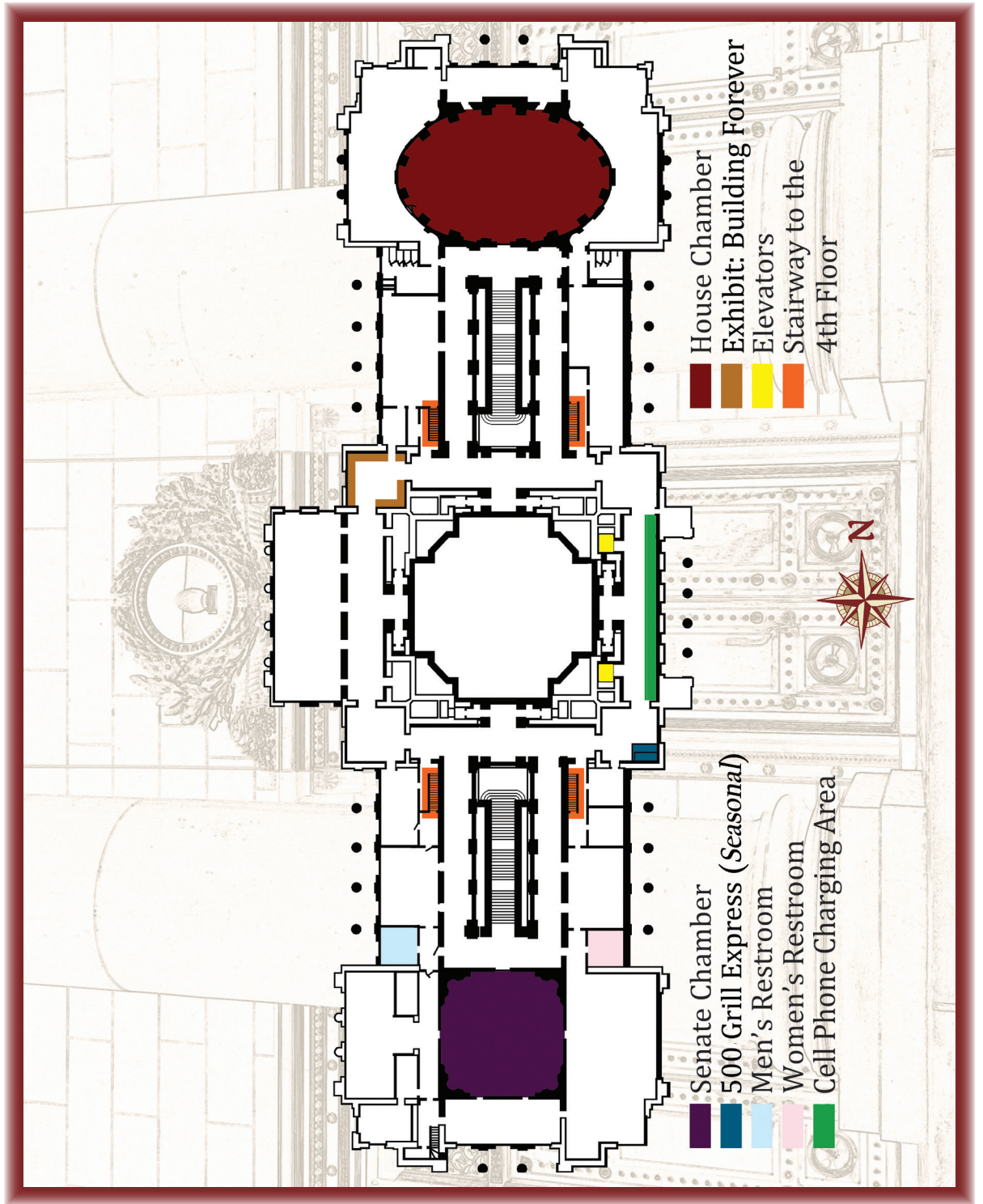
➤ **Terra-Cotta Oil Lamp**

The lamp is a traditional symbol of wisdom or enlightenment, the guiding spirit of good law.

The Courtroom's windows overlook the Capitol's South Mall and grounds, with views of the War of 1812 Memorial, the American Legion Eternal Flame, the Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial and, to the southwest, the Capitol Iris Beds (in season) and the present home of the Arkansas Supreme Court.



# Third Floor





# The Third Floor

## Heerwagen Murals

Above the grand staircases leading to the House and Senate chambers are four murals, visible at the ends of the barrel-vaulted skylights. The themes represented over the south (Senate) staircase are “Education and Justice”; over the north (House) staircase, “War confronts Religion”. These murals, the only public art commissioned for the new Capitol, came from the studio of Paul Martin Heerwagen, a Bavarian-born artist and interior decorator from Fayetteville, Arkansas. His commission for the work was \$10,000. Completed in October 1914, the oil-on-canvas murals were originally glued directly to the plaster walls below the skylights. The murals were restored between 1977 and 2002. “War” and “Religion” have since been removed for conservation; they are represented by full-scale replicas.



Education



Justice



War



Religion

## Legislative Composites

Group portraits of the Legislature are produced for every regular session. The Capitol's collection dates from 1911 to present, and are located in the hallways of the third and fourth floors.

## The State Senate

The state's legislative body, called the General Assembly, is composed of the State Senate and the House of Representatives. The Arkansas State Senate meets in the chamber located at the south end of the Capitol's third floor. *(If the chamber doors are closed, you can visit the public galleries located on the Fourth Floor.)* The Senate consists of thirty-five members, each of whom represents a district of approximately 85,000 people. Arkansas senators may serve a combined amount of time in both the Senate and the House of 16 years. The seating arrangement in the Senate is determined by seniority. The Lieutenant Governor serves as the President of the Senate and sits at the marble desk at the front of the room. The President Pro Tempore is elected by fellow senators to preside over the Senate on occasions when the Lieutenant Governor is absent.

Senate votes are taken by roll call. When a senator's name is called, he or she responds with a ye or nay vote; then the votes are tallied and the result is read aloud.

### *Meeting Times*

The General Assembly meets in regular session beginning the second Monday in January in each odd-numbered year. The regular session lasts for a minimum of 60 days, but can be extended by a two-thirds vote of both chambers.

The General Assembly also convenes for a fiscal session beginning the second Monday of February in each even-numbered year. This session lasts for a minimum of 30 days and may be extended up to 15 days by a three-fourths vote of both chambers. The governor may also call a special session if specific issues need to be addressed in the interim.

### *Decorative Features*

The Senate chamber was restored in 2001-2002. The decorative painting replicates the original décor applied by artist Paul Martin Heerwagen in 1914. The Senate President's marble desk is original, as is the 1,200-pound chandelier, the smallest of the Mitchell-Vance chandeliers in the building. In 1914, stained glass replaced the original crystal glass of the skylight in order to reduce the sun's glare; at about the same time, the first of several generations of draperies in the dome was installed to improve the room's acoustical properties. Outside the chamber and in adjacent galleries hang composite portraits of past Arkansas legislatures. The public viewing galleries are located in the balcony (fourth floor).



# House Chamber

## *Legislative Body*

The Arkansas House of Representatives consists of 100 members, each representing a district of approximately 30,000 residents. Ninety-nine representatives are assigned to seats on the chamber floor, while one, chosen by his or her peers, serves as the Speaker of the House, or chamber leader, and sits on the rostrum at the front of the chamber. Next to the Speaker sits the Parliamentarian, who interprets and enforces the rules of debate during each session. House clerks are seated in the lower rostrum spaces, and the area directly in front of the rostrum is designated as the Well of the House. Legislators stand here when introducing and speaking in favor or opposition of bills.

## *Voting Procedure*

Representatives use the buttons at their desks to transmit votes to the chamber's electronic voting system. The green button transmits a "yea" vote; the red a "nay" vote; the yellow signals the member is present, but not voting; the blue to request a page; and the white to request to speak. Votes are displayed on the screens at the front of the chamber, and then tallied electronically to show the final vote totals.

## *Architectural Elements*

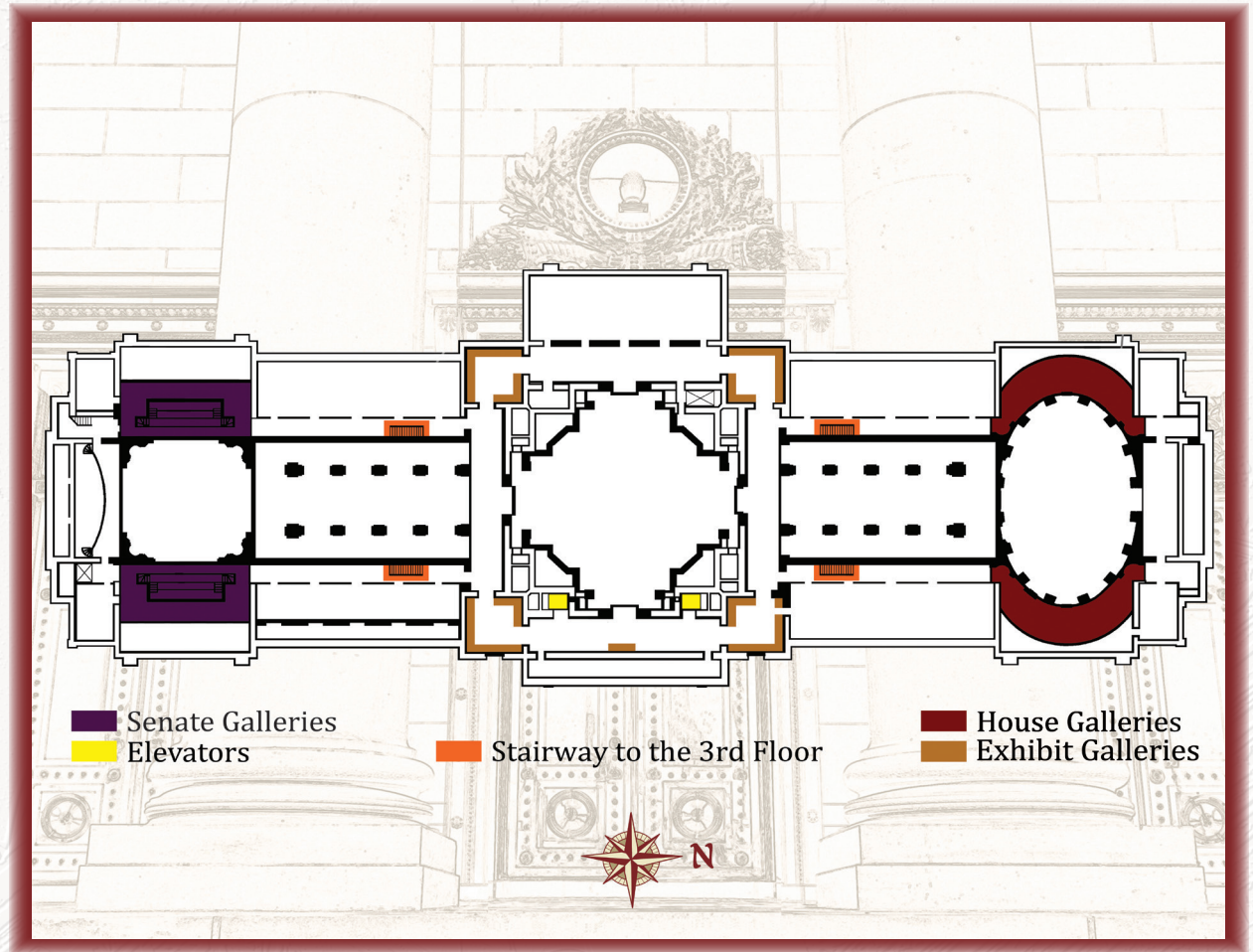
The columns and pilasters in the House chamber are finished in scagliola, a mixture of gypsum plaster, glue, pigments, and marble dust applied over a base surface, then polished, to simulate the look of marble. The scagliola, gilded capitals and other features were restored in 2009.

The chamber's original individual desks have been replaced several times; curved desks resembling those originally designed for the chamber (but never built) arrived in 2018. The 2000-pound Mitchell-Vance chandelier is original to the room. The exterior "greenhouse" protecting the stained-glass dome was rebuilt in 2012 and the century-old stained glass skylight, as well as the ceiling and the chamber's decorative finishes, were restored in 2014. At that time the ceiling drapes, installed in the 1920s to improve the room's lively acoustics, were removed.





# Fourth Floor



We hope you have enjoyed exploring the Arkansas State Capitol. As you make your way back down to the first floor, please take time to view the permanent exhibits on the third and fourth floors (see maps on pages 11 and above). On your way out, remember to pick up a memento of your visit at the Capitol Gift Shop in the first-floor rotunda.





# Downtown Little Rock Attractions

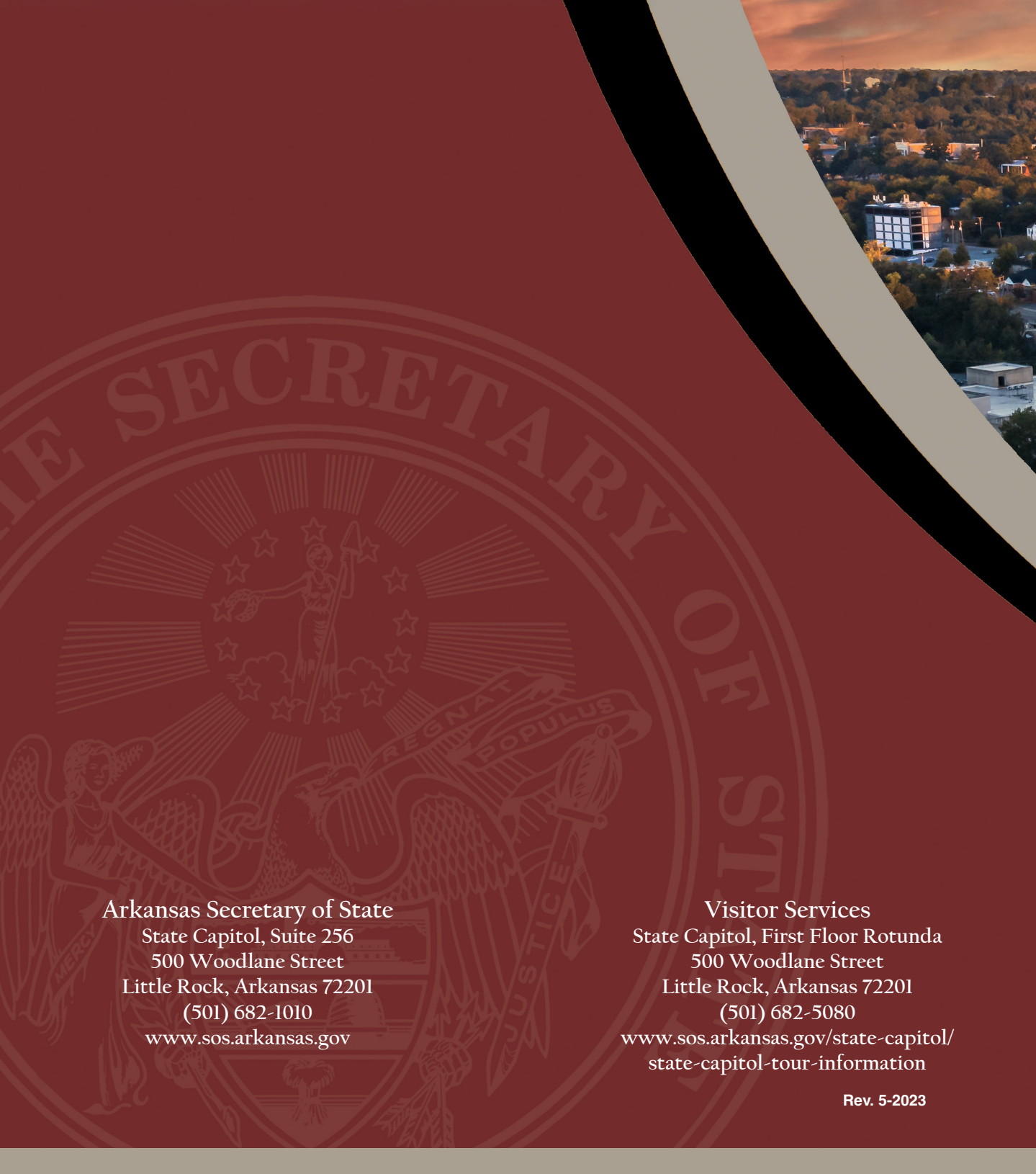
1. Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, 501 East 9th Street
2. Central Arkansas Library System, 100 S. Rock Street
3. Central High School Historic Site & Museum, 2125 Daisy Bates Drive
4. EMOBA: The Black Museum of Arkansas and Performing Arts, 1208 Louisiana Street
5. Governor's Mansion, 17th & Center Street
6. Heifer International, One World Avenue
7. Historic Arkansas Museum, 200 E. 3rd Street
8. Little Rock Marker, La Petit Roche, North end of Rock Street in Riverfront Park
9. Little Rock Visitor Information Center at Curran Hall, 615 E. Capitol Avenue
10. MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History, 503 E. 9th Street
11. Mt. Holly Cemetery, 12th & Broadway Street
12. Museum of Discovery, 500 President Clinton Avenue
13. Old State House Museum, 300 W. Markham Street
14. River Market, Dining, Arts & Entertainment District, President Clinton Avenue
15. Statehouse Convention Center, Markham & Main Street
16. William J. Clinton Presidential Center & Park, 1200 President Clinton Avenue
17. Arkansas State Capitol, Capitol & Woodlane Street
18. Pulaski County Court House, Markham & Spring Street
19. Municipal Parking Garage, Markham & Spring Street
20. Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, Broadway & 9th Street
21. Witt Stephens Jr. Central Arkansas Nature Center, 602 President Clinton Avenue
22. Junction Pedestrian Bridge
23. River Market Parking Garage, 2nd & Commerce Street

Compliments of

**Office of the Arkansas Secretary of State**

Map courtesy of Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau





## Arkansas Secretary of State

State Capitol, Suite 256  
500 Woodlane Street  
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(501) 682-1010  
[www.sos.arkansas.gov](http://www.sos.arkansas.gov)

## Visitor Services

State Capitol, First Floor Rotunda  
500 Woodlane Street  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201  
(501) 682-5080  
[www.sos.arkansas.gov/state-capitol/  
state-capitol-tour-information](http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/state-capitol/state-capitol-tour-information)