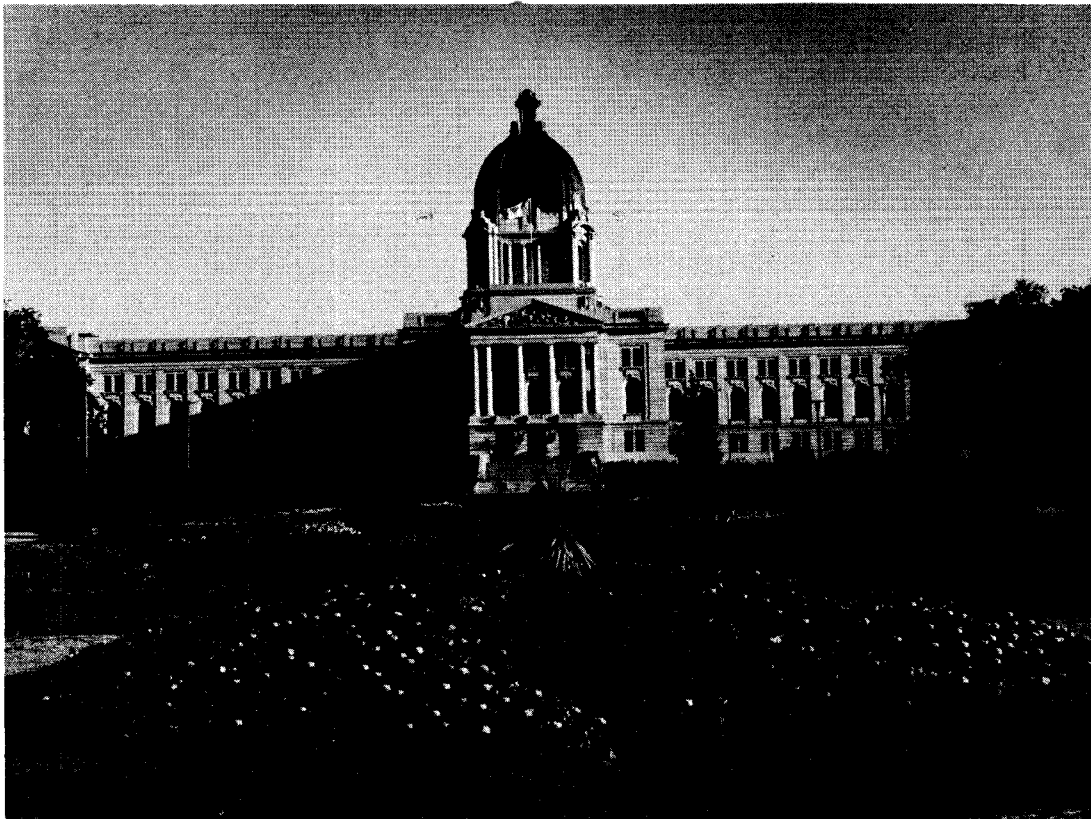


The Refurbishment of the Saskatchewan Legislative Chamber

"The wonderful growth of Canada is hardly realizable to those stay-at-home residents of the East, until, awakening from their lethargy, and undertaking a journey from coast to coast, it is brought home to them that in this wonderfully resourceful country of ours we are in the making of a nation, which tomorrow will be one of the great and powerful people of this earth, a people who occasionally are doing things on a big scale, and of a quality that will not only command the attention of the best art critics today - but for generations to come."

"It is greatly to the credit of those in prominent places, who control these matters, that results are obtainable that will be appreciated for all time, and while such is not the case in all Canadian undertakings, it makes it all the more creditable that such can be done if only proceeded with in an intelligent and broadminded way. In such a spirit was conceived and executed the newly finished legislative and executive buildings for the Province of Saskatchewan at Regina ..."



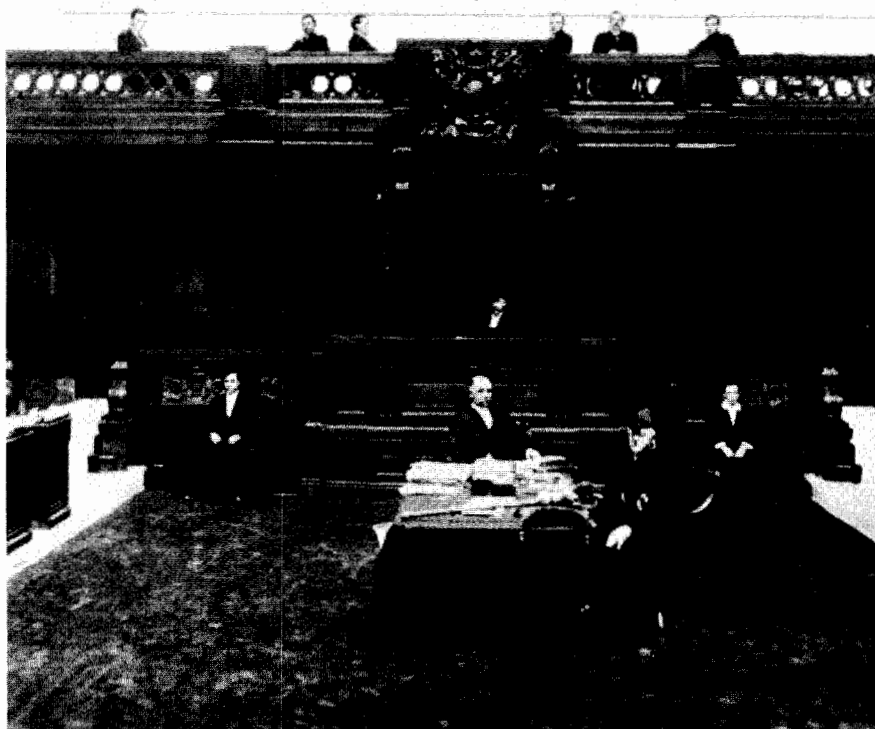
The Legislative Building, Regina

"By careful study of the massing, fenestration, outline and detail, a building such as is herewith presented has proved to be all that could be desired to house the Legislature and Administration of what is destined to be one of the most important Provinces of the Dominion."

These were the words of the Maxwell brothers of Montreal, Architects of the Saskatchewan Legislative Building. (An article entitled "Legislative and Executive Buildings, Regina," by E. & W.S. Maxwell appeared in Construction Magazine, Vol. 8, No. 1, January, 1915.) The building is located on the flat prairie on the bank of the Wascana, its dome visible for miles around. It was one of the first buildings on the south shore of the Wascana and constituted a noble and proud monument to the parliamentary system on the prairies.

The building is located on 162 acres of land and is of a size and style that portrayed the optimism and confidence of the newly formed province. This same buoyant spirit was exhibited in the Speech from the Throne in 1913, the first Session after the completion of the Chamber. His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, read to the Members assembled:

"It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this, the First Session of the Third Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. You are meeting during a time of great and general prosperity; the earth has given of its increase abundantly during the past season, and in every walk of life the beneficial results are evident."



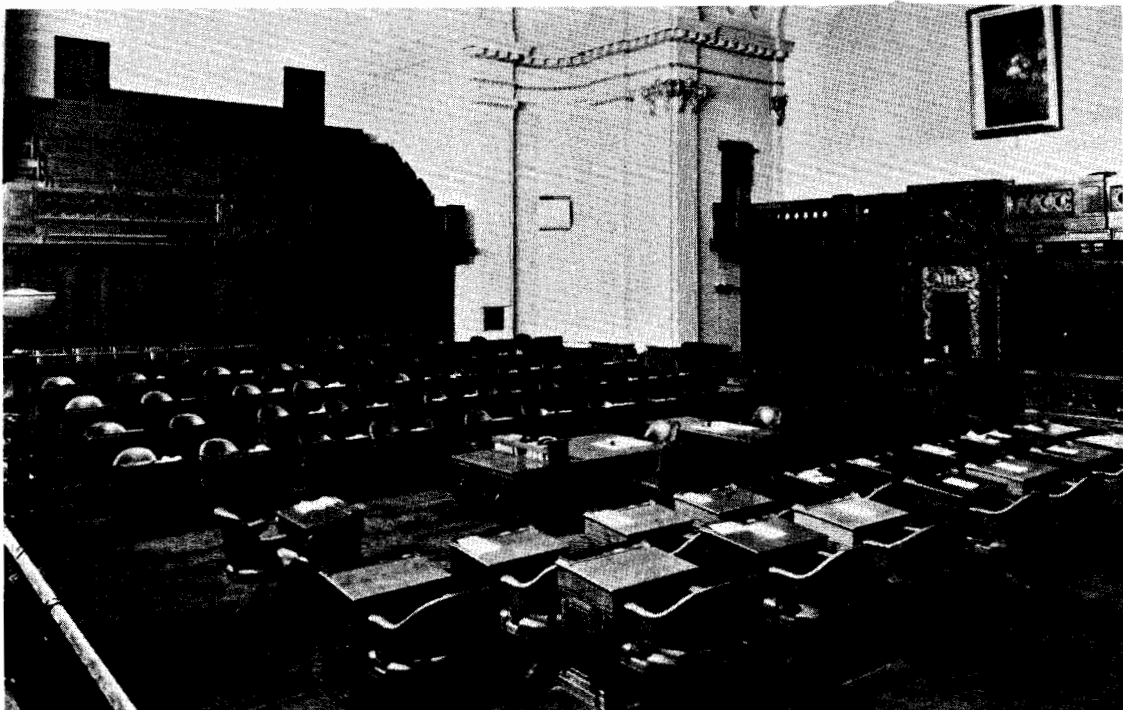
The Legislative Chamber of Saskatchewan before 1918 (showing the dais and the Speaker's desk) - Photo, courtesy of the Saskatchewan Archives Board

Within a decade and a half after the completion of the Legislative Building, the Province of Saskatchewan became the poorest province in Confederation due to the Great Depression and the worst drought ever recorded on the Prairies. Yet the Legislative Building with its high black dome and its Tyndall stone stood out over the parched dusty fields as a reminder of the faith of the pioneers in an elected responsible government and in the unlimited future of Saskatchewan.

It took many years for Saskatchewan to recover from the drought and depression and to regain its confidence and sense of optimism. On May 29, 1978, the refurbishment of the Legislative Chamber was begun with a similar spirit as was exhibited in 1913. Other wings of the Legislative Building had been refurbished over the last decade, but it was now time to refurbish the Chamber itself. On the first working day following the prorogation of the Fifth Session of the Eighteenth Legislature, the Department of Government Services' work crews began the refurbishment that was expected would take five months.

The entire program was guided by two principles: a determined effort to preserve the historic value of the Chamber and to do the work with local consultants and craftsmen. All of the consulting work was done by Regina firms and the refinishing of the oak walls and carvings was done by craftsmen in the Department of Government Services. The new sound reinforcement equipment was built and installed by Canadian firms and 88 per cent of the components were Canadian made. The only major item that was not Canadian was the carpet which was woven in Scotland.

The refurbishment program involved the remodelling of the air conditioning system; a new sound reinforcement and recording system; repair and painting of the plaster on the ceiling and walls; new acoustical treatment in the Chamber; some upgrading of the lighting system and a cleaning and refinishing of the oak wall panels, carvings and Members' desks. All of the furniture in the Chamber was the original furniture which had been designed for the Chamber by the Maxwell brothers. Although there was a major redesign of the inside of the Members'

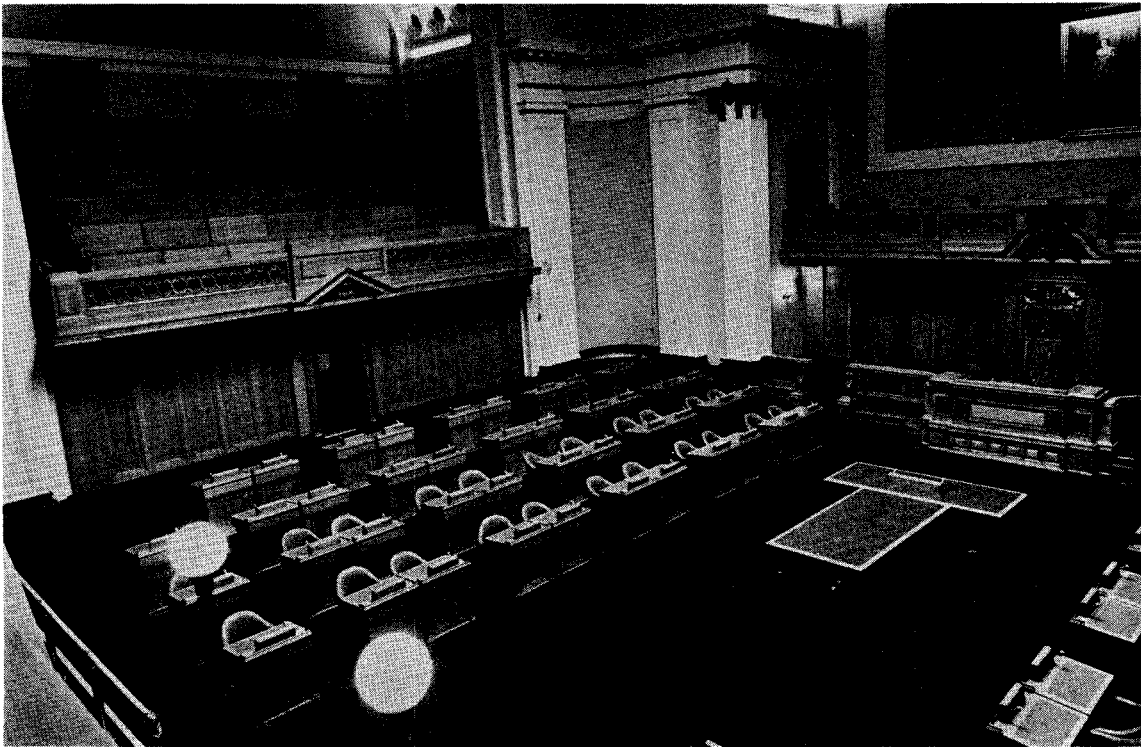


The Legislative Chamber of Saskatchewan from 1919 until refurbishing, with staircase in front of Speaker's Chair. (Photo, courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board)

desks in order to double the storage space, the exterior of the desks was unchanged in design. The oak was scraped, cleaned and oiled. The oak under the old varnish after sixty-five years was as firm and beautiful as when it had been installed originally.

There are two special historic features of the refurbishment. For over sixty years, the Speaker of the Legislature sat in a low-backed arm chair like the other Members. The tradition of having a special throne-like Chair had been abandoned in the early years of the Province. Before the formation of the Province, a special Chair was built for

double pedestal desk. In approximately 1918, this centre portion of the dais and the desk were removed and a "temporary" staircase was installed. The reason for the change in the dais has long been forgotten and the temporary staircase remained for sixty years. Fortunately the desk and frontispiece had not been destroyed and were stored in the dome of the Legislative Building. The pigeons and the rain had taken their toll on this furniture but this summer, it was found, restored and returned to the Legislative Chamber. The temporary staircase was removed and the Speaker's dais restored to its original state including the Speaker's desk.



The "new" Legislative Chamber of Saskatchewan

each Speaker and presented to him upon his retirement. The Chair of the Hon. Thomas MacNutt, Speaker from 1905-1908 was returned to the Legislative Assembly by the MacNutt family and now has been restored. This Chair will be placed once again in the Assembly for use by the Speaker.

The second feature involved the restoration of the dais. Originally the Speaker's dais had a solid oak frontispiece which extended across the dais in front of the Speaker and enclosed a

Sixty-six years after the completion of the Legislative Building, its focal point, the Legislative Chamber, has been refurbished and restored. All of the modern conveniences such as air conditioning and sound reinforcement have been incorporated into the original design without destroying the historic value and appearance of the Chamber. The Legislative Chamber was a monument to the optimism of the times in which it was constructed; its restoration in 1978 is perhaps symbolic of a reawakening of that spirit in the people of Saskatchewan.