

Shining a Light on Ontario's Parliamentarians: Chandeliers in the Legislative Chamber

Look up! Look way up in Ontario's legislative chamber and you'll be able to marvel at some magnificent chandeliers dating back to the 1890s. Tracing changes from gasoline to electricity, to more modern considerations such as broadcast requirements and energy efficient LED bulbs, the author shines a light on this interesting aspect of parliamentary history.

Susanne Hynes

Lighting in the Ontario Legislative Chamber is provided by four magnificent chandeliers dating back to 1893 and 10 smaller fixtures, in a similar style, added in 1985-86. The chamber, which is 65 feet wide, 80.5 feet long (north, south) and, at its highest, 71.5 feet above the chamber's floor, requires a lot of candle power to serve the needs of the legislators who occupy it.

1893

In 1893 when the building opened, lighting was provided by the four chandeliers, 22 bracket lights, and east, south, and west-facing windows above the public galleries and the Press Gallery.

In late 1892 the Bennett and Wright Company of Toronto designed the light fixtures to specifications of the building's architect, Richard Waite. The four chandeliers, referred to as "gasoliers," and 22 matching bracket lights were manufactured in the United States by the Central Gas Fixture Company of New York. Each chandelier cost \$700 and weighed 408 kilograms. They provided illumination through 24 electric lights

on spokes that reached out and down from the central decorative globe and 24 gas lights resembling candles and arranged in 6 clusters of four above the globe. Each chandelier is 18 feet in height with an 8.5 foot diameter and hangs 32 feet from the ceiling. Dual electric/gas lighting was necessary at the time of installation since the supply of electricity was unreliable. Gas, supplied through a pipe connecting the chandelier to the ceiling, was ignited by an electric charge that ran down wires on the fixtures, "turning on" the "candles."

Modifications

Over the next 100 years, the chandeliers were modified a number of times. Records are very sketchy but existing photographs show three significant changes.

Sometime before 1915, the downward spokes carrying electric bulbs were removed and metal bands were attached to hold the new downward-facing electric lights. The candelabra were wired for electricity around this time while the wall brackets installed in 1893 are not visible in 1912-13 photographs. The 1924 annual report of the Department of Public Works lists "the removal of the very strong glare in the lighting fixtures" as one of the maintenance jobs from the previous year. At some point between 1915 and 1968 the somewhat utilitarian metal bands were replaced by art deco rings that could accommodate lighting units both above and below the rings. The original central globes, their pendants and the candelabra have remained part of the fixtures to this day.

Susanne Hynes retired as the Research and Publications Librarian at the Legislative Library and Research Services branch of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 2016. She drew on information from Arleigh Holder, Hayley Shanoff and David Bogart for this article.

Broadcast Requirements

The chandelier lighting originally designed for ambient and task lighting had to be upgraded to accommodate televised sessions that began in 1985-1986. The Television Lighting System was designed to use the ceiling of the Chamber as a reflector and Ontario is the first Assembly in Canada to have indirect television lighting (direct lighting causes glare and discomfort). Ten new chandeliers, in a similar style, were added to the chamber to light the various galleries at this time.

The television lighting is located within the existing chandeliers as independent units. Fixtures in the four chandeliers were upgraded to increase the lighting levels. Recently, the ambient and task lighting was upgraded to LED technology. A study is currently underway to look at converting the TV lights to LED technology.

The current TV bulbs are high intensity metal halides generating a high amount of heat and they use a lot of power.

Changing the Light Bulbs

Changing the light bulbs and performing maintenance on chandeliers suspended more than 40 feet above the floor of the chamber would be quite a challenge if attempted on ladders. The solution was part of the original design: each chandelier, using a hand windlass system located in the attic above the chamber's ceiling, was lowered once a year to be cleaned before the session began. Today electric winches have replaced the windlasses.

Photo credits: Above: Susanne Hynes, 2016. Below: Arleigh Holder. Opposite page: Legislative Assembly, 1893.

Energy Efficiency

During debate on Bill 21, the *Energy Conservation Responsibility Act, 2005*, Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant) discussed the energy efficiency of the illumination provided by the Chamber's chandeliers.

Each chandelier has, gosh, something like 32 lights, as I recall. There are four of them. There are 128 light bulbs right there. They're not the twisty light bulbs. I don't know whether these are energy-efficient light bulbs or not. I offer a challenge to this government: If these four chandeliers and these 128 light bulbs are not efficient, and we have speaker after speaker admonishing, lecturing and suggesting to the public how important it is for them to change their light bulbs to something a little more energy-efficient, they might take a look 40 feet up and decide whether those light bulbs have been changed or not.

... There are a number of smaller chandeliers in this room, and this is one room in the Ontario Legislature, albeit a very large room. This room is actually as high as my barn, and granted, it will take a fair bit of electricity, if this is old-fashioned technology, to light this particular room.

Hansard, November 22, 2005

Fortunately video camera equipment available in 2016 that is more light-sensitive than earlier equipment and the availability of LED lighting for high intensity fixtures are enabling the Assembly to provide more efficient Chamber lighting. And, as has been done many times over the past 123 years, Chamber lighting is being studied and modified to meet the current needs of the Legislature.



