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Detail from one of the columns in the newly-restored State Capitol rotunda.

State Capitol

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Melander, president of the Minnesota State Building and Construction Trades Council. “We want to say thanks.”

Melander reflected that the State Capitol restoration project was the type of project you drive by “and tell your kids and grandkids” about your work there.

And 40 percent of the work involved in the all-union Capitol restoration was performed by women and minority workers, reported Matt Massman, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Administration.

“Tradeswomen and tradesmen left their mark here,” said State Senator Jeff Hayden, DFL-Minneapolis. “It makes this building work for the 21st century.”

“Putting modern-day systems in a 1905 building — it’s not easy,” said Jeff Callinan, project executive for general contractor JE Dunn Construction.

“It was really amazing to see the personal pride in everybody’s eyes as they worked on this building,” said Kimberly Sandbulte, project architect for HGA. She said today’s workers were well-aware they were restoring the “personal handwork” of the original craftsmen. “Everyone working here wanted to honor and preserve that history,” she said.

The August 13 gathering was attended by some 200 descendants of the workers who built the Capitol during 1896-1907 (*see story and photos, page 24*).

They were identified as part of research by the University of Minnesota’s Labor Education Service. That research led to a multi-media project and school curriculum, “Who Built Our Capitol?”

“Today we celebrate the story of workers,” said sixth grade teacher Jen Hansen of Owatonna’s Willow Creek Middle School, who helped develop the curriculum. “It’s the story of labor and the risks they took. It’s the story of immigrants and where the workers came from.”

Hansen’s students, who studied the curriculum in 2015, asked, “why aren’t the workers recognized and memorialized in the building that they created?”

The students began a drive to support such a memorial, collecting signatures on petitions, meeting with legislators, and ultimately helping to pass a bill that led to a memorial plaque — now part of the newly-restored State Capitol.

Located in the Capitol basement outside Room B-15, the plaque lists the names of workers who died during the 1896-1907 construction and reads: “In honor of the six workers who lost their lives during the original construction of the State Capitol Building, and in special thanks to the thousands of workers who helped construct and restore this beautiful symbol of Saint Paul and Minnesota.”

Near the plaque, visitors will find a display of photographer Tom Olscheid’s black and white images of workers engaged in the recent State Capitol restoration work.



**In recognition of the contributions
that Union workers have made to the
strength, prosperity and well-being
of our country.**

Happy Labor Day from OPEIU Local 12

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