



HOUSE VISION 2020 COMMITTEE

Hon. Larry Campbell

HOUSE BILL No. 2655

February 15, 2016

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

This correspondence is to convey my support for HB2655 which allows the erection of a limestone monument on the grounds of the State Capitol to commemorate the initial limestone block laid at the Capitol by Kansas Masons in 1866. I have provided the following overview of the historical significance of this request.

The Historical Significance of the Kansas State Capitol Cornerstone and the Masons

In 1866, the Kansas Legislature passed an act that provided for the erection of a State House. The Board of State House Commissioners, headed by then Governor Samuel J. Crawford, appointed J. G. Haskell as architect and Silver and Son as the construction company. In May of 1866, construction began on the Capitol, and by October, Kansas State officials were ready to lay the cornerstone for the East Wing. On October 9, 1866, by a resolution from the Board of State House Commissioners, Secretary of State R. A. Barker wrote a communication to the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kansas requesting that the officers and members of the Grand Lodge of Kansas be present and lay the cornerstone of the State Capitol on Wednesday, October 17, 1866. After ascertaining the hour of the ceremonies, the Grand Lodge accepted the invitation to lay the cornerstone.

The ceremonies started with a procession formed on Kansas Avenue. The procession included the Knights Templar, an order of York Rite Masonry, along with State Officials, Clergy, the Masonic Order, the Veteran Brotherhood and Returned Soldiers, and City Officials. After the procession, Grand Master M. S. Adams initiated the ceremonies and introduced Reverend J. D. Knox who offered a prayer. Then, Honorable R. A. Barker placed the specified items in the copper capsule within the cornerstone. These items include, but are not limited to; the Holy Bible, Kansas State Laws, Public Documents, State Officer Reports, Constitution and By-Laws of the Grand Encampment of the Veteran Brotherhood, Roll of Officers and Members of the Topeka Encampment of Veteran Brotherhood, Roll of Officers and Members of Topeka Lodge No. 17, and a copy of every newspaper published in the state. Many inscriptions were also added to the stone itself. On the North face these included Governor S. J. Crawford, Secretary of State R. A. Barker, Auditor of the State J. R. Swallow, the members of the Board of Commissioners, and Topeka Lodge No. 17. On the East face the stone had the inscription "Laid by the Grand Lodge of A. F. & A. M., State of Kansas Oct. 17th A. L. 5866."

The local newspaper, *Weekly Leader*, characterized the event as having vast crowds from different parts of the state who came to see the laying of the cornerstone, and that it was seen as a milestone in Kansas history. The paper goes on to say that the ceremony, including the Masons' prayer



that the stone might survive the blighting of the ages and that joy and peace would prevail throughout the state, was most fitting and proper in every respect.

The plan for the cornerstone surviving the ages did not pan out, as the material choice for the three foot wide by six foot long stone was changed from Limestone to an inferior Brownstone from south of Topeka. This stone type, coupled with the bitter winter of 1866-1867, left the cornerstone and foundation cracked and unsound. What was left of the foundation was excavated and replaced with Limestone, but the cornerstone had disintegrated, leaving the copper time capsule hidden until 1950 when it was discovered by workmen repairing the original foundation. On July 17, 1950, an investigation of the capsule's holdings took place. All that remained in the capsule was disintegrated textual records, corroded coins, and bugs. Under the Executive Council, the contents were restored to the box and replaced on October 26, 1950. A bronze plaque is now used to mark the replacement of the capsule. That bronze plaque stood to commemorate the original cornerstone until the late 2000's until it was removed due to remodeling of the State House. Once it was removed it was not replaced after the remodeling was finished and the bronze plaque created to commemorate the original cornerstone seems to be lost.

Since the original construction of the Kansas State House, Kansas Masonic history has been closely woven in with Kansas history and the history of the State House. Twice, Kansas State Officials have decided to put up what was expected to be permanent record of Kansas Masonry's involvement with the State House. That is the goal that we would like to achieve again. We would like to make that shared history know and permanent by placing record of it on the Capitol, like the ancestors of this great state tried to do in 1866 and again in 1950.

I ask for your support by passage of HB2655.

Respectfully submitted,

Daren L. Kellerman
Grand Master of Masons in Kansas