

LOCAL HISTORY

'Capitol Story' reborn after 10-year labor

Architectural gem shines in new full-color edition of 1964 book

By Paul Grondahl

Albany

Philanthropist and civic-minded benefactor Matthew Bender IV has done a lot of heavy lifting for social and cultural causes in the capital city, but nothing prepared him for the 10-year toil required to publish a new edition of "Capitol Story," an indispensable history of Albany's most storied building first published 50 years ago.

"I'm relieved the goddamn thing is done," said Bender, 83, who is normally soft-spoken and gentle-natured.

The decade-long thicket of obstacles, reviews, demands and reconsiderations he encountered from gatekeepers on the second floor of four separate administrations turned the placid Bender occasionally surly.

The book on the building

The new edition of "Capitol Story" by C.R. Roseberry, published by SUNY Press, was originally scheduled to be released in January 2015.

But the \$39.95 hardcover coffee table book is out early and copies will be available for sale at the Albany Institute of History & Art, local bookstores and directly from the publisher. <http://www.sunypress.edu>. 472-5000.



The difficulties and false starts were forgotten in the glow of celebration Thursday night at a pre-publication release party at the Albany Institute of History & Art. This is the third edition of a book first published in 1964 and reprinted in 1982. "Capitol Story" was written by C.R. "Tip" Roseberry, a Times Union feature writer and critic who died in 1990 at 88. Roseberry was commissioned to write the book by the state Office of General Services after he left the paper and became

a freelancer.

The new full-color, oversized hardcover volume features a new chapter on Capitol restoration projects by Diana Waite of Mount Ida Press, new photography by Gary Gold, a new index, new source notes and additional research by Capitol architect Jim Jamieson and Andrea Lazarski of OGS. It includes forewords by Governors Nelson A. Rockefeller and Andrew Cuomo, who takes credit for shaving two years and \$2.3 million off the cost of restoration concluded in 2012 after an accelerated work schedule.

The 207-page book, published by the Excelsior Editions imprint of SUNY Press, sells for \$39.95.

The publication was aided by the Albany Institute of History & Art and Mount Ida Press and was overseen by OGS.

The "Capitol Story" project was a labor of love for Bender, longtime chairman of the state Commission on the Restoration of the Capitol. He was appointed to the commission when it was first formed in 1979.

"I love the building," said Bender, great-grandson of the founder of the legal publisher Matthew Bender & Co. of Albany. The Bender family sold the business to the Times-Mirror Co. in 1963.

Bender contributed \$10,000 to the project from his family foundation and raised more than \$50,000, with large contributions from Furthermore of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, Gerry Charitable Trust, Simpson Gumpertz & Heger and others.

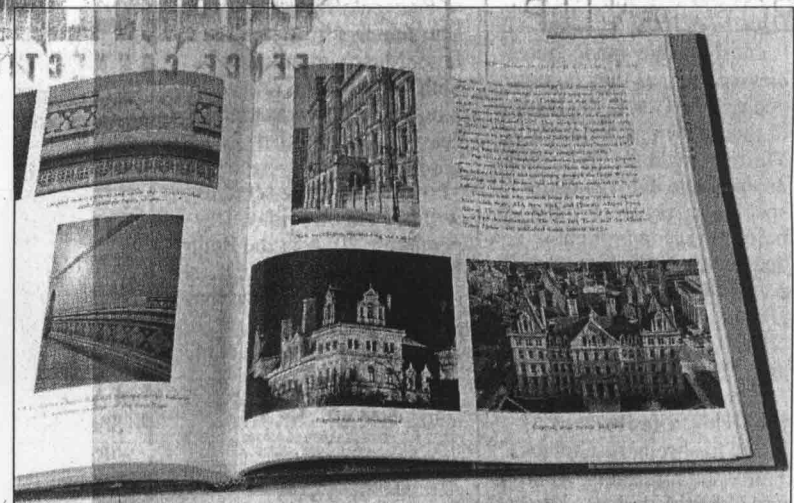
He brought Waite on board, Bender's collaborator on "Albany Architecture: A Guide to the City," published by Mount Ida Press in 1993. The book is still in print and has sold more than 4,000 copies. The two have offices in the same downtown Albany building, one floor apart.

"The reason Matthew and I did this 'Capitol Story' project was to create a reference book of lasting value," Waite said. "It's a completely different book than it was before, and it pulls together everything about the Capitol in one place for the first time. We also wanted to create a constituency



Library of Congress

The Capitol's iconic ornate staircase, above, in a photo taken at the turn of the 20th century. Below, a page of newly published third edition of "Capitol Story," that chronicles the building's recent restorations in 1977 and 2013.



Will Waldron / Times Union

for the building and its preservation."

The Capitol is the Empire State's crown jewel, considered by architectural historians to be one of the grandest buildings of 19th-century America and a National Historic Landmark. It was also a construction boondoggle. It cost \$25 million and 32 years to build and fell years behind schedule and millions over budget. Newly inaugurated Gov. Theodore Roosevelt declared the building "complete" on Feb. 4, 1899. He froze any additional construction spending, fired the architect and ordered workers off the site. A soaring dome intended to cover an empty courtyard died on the drafting board.

By comparison, the state spent about \$46 million during 12 years of extensive repairs to replace a badly leaking roof, to reopen skylights covered over during World War II and to undertake extensive cleaning of the Great Western Staircase and other interior

restoration work before Cuomo declared it "complete" in 2012.

At times, it felt like the new "Capitol Story" volume might end up taking as long as the Capitol construction.

"There were periods of anger and frustration," Bender conceded. "But I take a great deal of satisfaction in completing it. We could never have gotten it done without Diana. We are symbiotic collaborators. I especially appreciate that she's a tiger on accuracy."

The book deserves a place on the shelf alongside other important, enduring reference books published on Albany history over the last 150 years.

"It's a celebration of the building and the work that's been done," Waite said. "But it's also a call to stay alert and to support the preservation of the Capitol in the future. We need to keep it up so it doesn't fall into disrepair again."

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