

**Views of the New York State Library in the Capitol, Albany, N.Y., 1890s**

**PRI3839+**

**QUANTITY:** 21 black-and-white photographs, 27 x 37 cm. on cardboard mounts 36 x 43 cm. (stored in a folio box)  
**ACCESS:** Open to research  
**ACQUISITION:** Source unknown; accessioned in October 1980  
**PROCESSED BY:** Vicki Weiss, Senior Librarian, Manuscripts and Special Collections, September 2010

**Historical Note:**

The New York State Library was established in 1818 to collect, preserve, and make available materials that support State government work. Its collections originally were housed in a building that is now called “the old capitol” located atop the hill at the junction of State and Eagle streets in Albany. In 1855 the library was moved to a separate building, which was connected by a corridor with the old capitol. In 1883 the library building needed to be razed to facilitate completion of the new capitol; thus, the library collection was moved into rooms and corridors in the portion of the building that was ready for occupancy. Formal space for the library, on the third and fourth floors of the new capitol building, was completed and occupied by the mid-1890s. Its central reference room was a multi-storied cavernous high-ceilinged room that was typical of many of the rooms in the capitol. The library was housed there until the fire of March 29, 1911, gutted the reading rooms and destroyed much of its holdings. Remnants that were salvaged after the fire, along with an extensively rebuilt collection, were again available for research use when the library re-opened in the State Education Building, which was formally dedicated in October 1912. It remained in the Education Building until 1978, when it moved into its current home, the Cultural Education Center.

**Scope and Content Note:**

This is a collection of images depicting the public reading rooms and librarians’ work areas when the State Library was housed on the western side of the New York State Capitol during the 1890s. It includes several views of the central reference room and special reading rooms for using the library’s law and medical collections. The space was designed by architect Isaac G. Perry, whose love for fancy woodwork and stone carvings is quite evident in these photographs. Some of the finest examples of ornate woodwork are seen in views depicting the double wooden entry doors, the loan desk and the “speaking tube closet.”

The images have no captions. In the cases where a caption is given, the information comes from *The Red Book: An Illustrated Legislative Manual of the State* (Albany, N.Y.: J.B. Lyon, Publishers, 1906) or *Views in the New York State Library: Third, Fourth and Fifth Floors, West End of the State Capitol, Albany* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed-Parsons Printing Co., [1893?] [sic]) (NYSL call number: N,027.5747,V671,98-5604)

All but one of the photoprints, Print 2, is stamped “Wendell, Albany, N.Y.” Emory I. Wendell is listed in the 1899 and 1900 Albany city directories as working for Robinson & Wendell, commercial photographers; the 1901 directory says he had “removed to Orwell, Vt.”

**List of Prints:**

<b>Print</b>	<b>Caption / [Description]</b>
1	[View of the painted ceiling taken from the first floor of the central reference room] / [The ceiling is framed by three windows and several arches that define the third tier of the room. The motif of the central painting is several cherubs hovering around a book.]
2	[View of the central reference room of the New York State Library, State Capitol Building, Room 35, with its high ceiling, looking south (?)] / [The height of the room allowed for three tiers of stacks lined with bookcases and with small tables and chairs for reading or working. Several portraits in frames of various sizes are positioned around the room.] (Originally PRI3840+)
3	Central reference room, Room 35, looking northeast / [Image of six men sitting at desks and tables in the reading room; part of the second tier can be seen.]
4	Central reference room, Room 35, upper north arches / [This photo was taken from the third tier; a man is sitting at a table.]
5	[View of a central reference room, Room 35, looking south] / [This photo was taken from the third tier of the room; windows on right and bookcases on left. Several portraits in frames of various sizes are positioned around the room.]
6	[Close-up view of the] central reference room, Room 35, looking south / [This photo was taken from the first floor, showing the first and second tiers of bookcases; window on the right; some card catalog drawers can be seen on the left; also in the photo are two portraits and two white marble busts on pedestals.]
7	Central reference room, Room 35, upper south arches / [Image of two women working at tables. The women are framed by the arches that form part of the support of the room; behind them are bookcases.]
8	[Close-up view of the third tier of the central reference room showing bookcases and tables and chairs with books and papers on the tables.]
9	[View of] central reference room, Room 35, looking southeast] / [Image shows double wooden doors and card catalog drawers as well as wooden tables and chairs, portraits and one marble bust atop a pedestal; part of the third tier also is visible.]
10	[Close-up view of the double wooden doors central reference room, Room 35 (pictured in Print 9)] / [Shown are wooden tables and chairs, bookcases on either side of the doors and portraits above the bookcases.]
11	Central reference room, Room 35 / [Close-up view of the ornately carved loan desk, at the main entrance, situated between the two wooden double doors and the ornately carved door of the “speaking-tube closet.” To the right are several card catalog drawers with ample space for more drawers to be added. This loan desk is not in Prints 9 and 10 of the same area.]
12	First law reading room, Rooms 36-37, looking south – Foreign Reports / [View of the hallway showing the reading room with a large wooden cabinet, a librarian’s desk, shelves of books off to the left and part of the second tier of bookcases.]
13	Second law reading room, Room 38; vista looking south through eight rooms / [In the

	foreground are tables and chairs of the reading room and two tiers of bookcases; in the background are shelves of books and a hallway leading to other reading rooms.]
14	[Another view of the vista looking south]
15	Third law reading room, Room 39, looking east – New York Law / [View of a reading room with wooden tables and chairs in the foreground flanked by bookcases; in the background is a stairway to the second level of the two-story room; a pendulum clock hangs on the back wall.]
16	[View of two stories of reading/work room with tables and chairs in the center and bookshelves on the right, left and in the back; a cylindrical container with a lid sits atop a small wooden table on the left.]
17	State medical library, Room 34; accession, shelf-list and classification departments / [Three women and two men sit on wooden chairs at wooden desks. In the background are stairs leading to the second and third levels of the room.]
18	[Office space (?) showing seven women and one man working at desks and tables. In the background are a window and bookcases.]
19	[Office space (?) showing two men and one woman working at wooden desks; another man is seated in a chair in front of a fireplace. In the background can be seen books on shelves and the second level of the room. The sign under the clock reads: SMOKING/ LIGHTED CIGARS/ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED.]
20	North iron stack and bindery, Room 46 / [View of bookbinding department showing three men and two women working on the various steps related to bookbinding. In background can be seen three levels of storage shelves]
21	University of the State of New York – Examination Record Room / [View of the two tiers of the top floor the State Education Department space of the Capitol showing the turn-buckle of a steel strut extending from the roof and materials stored on shelves]

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