

The Historic “Red Room” at the Bataan Memorial Building to be Restored to Period Dated Architecture

By Joseph Vigil, Public Information Officer, GSD

Renovations are now in the works to restore the Bataan Memorial Building’s “Red Room” to one of its previous architectural periods. The “Red Room” holds significant historical value as the former Senate chamber during the building's tenure as the state's capitol. The chamber was central to New Mexico's legislative processes from the building's completion in 1900 until the state government relocated to the current Roundhouse Capitol in 1966.



The building, originally serving as the New Mexico Territorial Capitol, was designed by architect Isaac Hamilton Rapp and completed in 1900. It became the state capitol when New Mexico achieved statehood in 1912. It housed the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, with the Senate chamber - later known as the “Red Room” - playing a pivotal role in the state's legislative history.

“The main goal is to renovate and restore the red room to its capabilities,” said Marilyn Martinez, FMD project manager assigned to see the project through from fruition design to construction. “We will do the review along with the Historical Society and the Department of Cultural Affairs since the building is now on the State and National Historic Registry and there are certain needs we must meet.”

The name “Red Room” likely originates from the room's distinctive red décor at the time, a common practice for naming rooms based on their color schemes. While specific details about the interior design

are limited, it's customary for legislative chambers to feature rich color palettes, with red often symbolizing authority and tradition. This naming convention is also seen in other government buildings, including the White House's Red Room, which is adorned with red fabrics and furnishings.

After the government moved to the new Roundhouse Capitol in 1966, the building was renamed the Bataan Memorial Building in 1968 in honor of the 1,800 New Mexico National Guard soldiers who fought valiantly in the Philippines during World War II while being severely outnumbered, surrendered by U.S. top military leaders, and forced by their capturers to move to prisoner of war camps in the gruesomely inhumane Bataan Death March. Less than 900 survived the almost four years of captivity and made it back home to their families.

The space, which was most recently used as a public space, is currently deemed uninhabitable because of degradation and ceiling pieces falling. The building is being reroofed to take care of leaks before moving forward.



“Because of the different period architecture of when it was first built in 1900 to the renovations in 1951 and 1980’s, we are doing archival, investigative research of photos, preliminary drawings, and construction information of what happened during the previous renovations to review with the appropriate agencies and determine how it will function in the future,” said Martinez. “After that, we will have a program scope and what the construction will be, depending on the material saves and abatement test results.”

Martinez said they are hoping to start with the design drawings as soon as possible and will move forward to construction once approved by state historian archives who does a review of every archive space.

“At a first look, there are a lot of good bones in here to work with,” said Becca Snyder, architect and partner at Woven Architecture. “During this first phase, we will look at what is existing, what things are still in place, status of environmental concerns, and what the space can be used for so we can make it into a useable space. Once we determine what is existing, phase II will determine which historic period we are going back to that’s appropriate and then move from schematic design through construction administration.”

Martinez, who has been assigned to the building for four years, said she learns more about the building every day and still finds remnants of the construction in interspatial spaces.

Because of the period dated offices, pillars, and columns of the 50’s, the Oppenheimer movie was filmed here.

“Ultimately, we want to make this renovation worthy of what this building stands for,” said Martinez. “We want it to be part of the memorial that represents those service members. We want to match that energy and make it something worthy for them.”

Today, the building houses the Department of Finance and Administration, Department of Veteran Services, Department of Cultural Affairs, Office of the State Engineer and stands as a testament to New Mexico's rich political and cultural history.