Photograph courtesy—Oklahoma Historical Society

Photograph courtesy—Hursley Photography

Capitol Rotunda—soon after completion in 1917 (left) and in November of 2002.

engineer for the project. "Flintco and Manhattan were competitors, but they set that aside to build the dome," Blake said. And, he added, it took the commitment of Governor Frank Keating, a governor not seeking re-election, to handle the dogfights.

Construction of the dome began, after feasibility studies were conducted, in April 2001. There were, of course, difficulties with both funding and construction. But after feasibility studies yielded positive results, then followed Supreme Court challenges related to funding, continued political wrangling, the search for millions in donations, and even more important problems, such as how to seize twenty-two House parking places during the session to make room for construction people and their equipment. But once these political and financial obstacles were met and overcome, eight decades after completion of the original building, construction of the State Capitol dome began.

Handshakes and headaches

That the high dome was a process of constructing, restoring, renovating, and creating, made the project inherently difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. "Nobody's done a dome in a long time," as one construction overseer stated. There were difficulties with nature: The Oklahoma wind interfered frequently with the operation of the state's tallest tower crane (at 280 feet). Some difficulties were logistic, such as those related to keep-

Photographs courtesy—Hursley Photography

Early construction of the high dome involved the installation of the structural steel with the use of a tower crane 280 feet tall.

ing the State Capitol Building operational while taking the roof off. There were difficulties related to the restoration features of the construction, such as ways of dismantling or otherwise protecting murals and other valuable works of art, and storing them, and re-installing them. And renovation difficulties were created when combining old architectural and construction methods with new ones, especially new building codes. The original building, in 1917, never had a fire protection system, for example.

Photographs courtesy—Hursley Photography

Several shots of the saucer dome before removal (June 2001).

And then there was the weighty matter of the saucer dome removal. A dome builder remarked, "We never got the full grasp of that concrete saucer dome until we dismantled everything in there, took out the skylight and took the state seal down. When we finally exposed all of this concrete structure up in there, we could not believe it!" The saucer dome removal, all 2 million pounds of brick and concrete, came out with a jackhammer and thousands of wheelbarrow-loads. The task took four months.

The pre-cast concrete sections that comprise the exterior of the dome were made by trial and error. Simply, it is very difficult to find a company that makes pieces this size. Or shape. Several attempts were required simply to get the mold right. The dome is clad with hundreds of pre-cast pieces, ranging

Photographs courtesy—Hursley Photography

Pre-cast concrete sections comprise the exterior of the dome, ranging in size and weight from a briefcase to a small car.