



The State Capitol Its Art and Architecture

Original Slide Show – Carolyn Howe Porter

Script– Martha (Porter) Kilgour

Narrator – Sarah Kilgour

Capitol Lakes, May 4, 2017

Unknown source

View from the Capitol 100 years ago



Martha Kilgour

Source: Kilgour family (# ? Martha Kilgour)

When I was a child, my favorite story was about children who found a wonderful treasure in an old trunk in the attic. I love this story, but I knew it would never happen to me because I'd seen everything in our family trunks and it wasn't treasure. Interesting... perhaps... and odd... but hardly treasure.

After I had small children of my own, my aunt moved from her home of 50 years and left an old family trunk in her attic. In the bottom of this trunk was a flat box, and in it was a packet of things I had never seen before... pictures of the 4th Capitol while it was being builtand letters addressed to my grandmother, Carolyn Howe Porter (next slide)



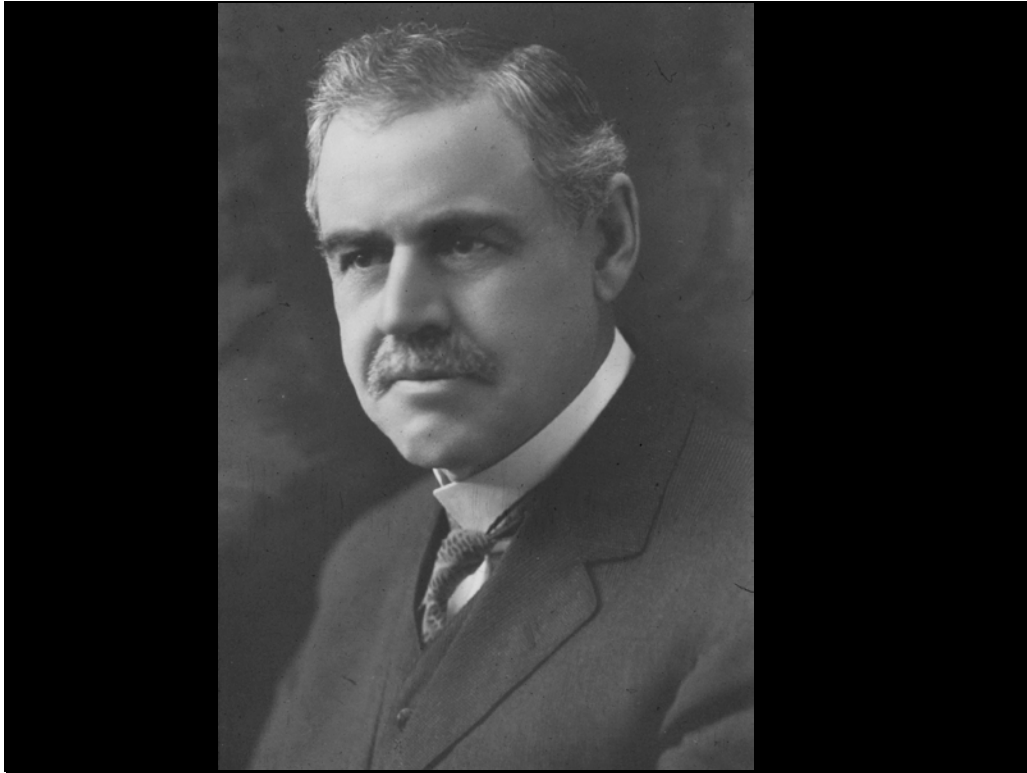
Unknown source

The letters were from artists and sculptors who had decorated the Capitol...artists like Karl Bitter, Kenyon Cox, Edwin Blashfield, Atillio Piccirilli, and Daniel Chester French. In these letters they told my grandmother about themselves and what they envisioned when they designed the murals and sculpture.

There was also a script in the trunk. It was for a lantern slide lecture that Grandmother had developed from the letters and talking with the men who decorated the Capitol. At that time, prior to television, radio, & computers, the people who built this capitol saw it as an opportunity educate the people of Wisconsin about government and citizenship. They felt a splendid Capitol would inspire them to be informed, responsible citizens. And Grandmother saw her work as taking this story out to the people of Wisconsin

From 1914 to 1920, she traveled by horse and carriage to lecture to many groups of people in the Madison area, and by train to Milwaukee, Prairie du Chien, Portage and other southern Wisconsin towns.

Grandmother was a logical person to do this as her husband, my grandfather, was Lew Forster Porter, (next slide) the state's supervising architect during the construction of the Capitol. He was also Secretary of the Capitol Building Commission.



Unknown source

I remember meeting a capitol guard when I was young. He had been a workman during the construction and he told me a story about a railing that had arrived. Grandfather looked at it and felt fairly sure it did not meet the specifications of a solid bronze rail. He felt sure enough about this that he took a hacksaw and cut through the middle of the railing. Sure enough, it was not solid bronze. The company had to take it back and redo it to specifications. This was part of grandfather's responsibility as supervising architect: to see that the materials met specifications and that the state got what it paid for.

As the secretary to the Building Commission he had an even bigger job. Because the commission acted as its own general contractor, the bids for everything in the Capitol.. from the stonework on the outside.. to the light bulbs, the boiler, the bubbling fountains, & the cuspidors..all the bids came across Grandfather's desk, along with the correspondence with the architect in new York and the commissions and contracts for the painters and sculptors. At present, 18 cubic feet of space in the archives of the Historical Society is filled with the letters that Grandfather wrote and received during the 12 years of Capitol construction.



Image ID 131006

The story of the Capitol really starts back in 1903. At that time the state government had outgrown the 1869 Capitol building, even after adding two wings. The legislature set up a Capitol Improvement Commission and directed them to plan and build an addition to the Capitol and render the whole thing modern and up to date. For months they had casually worked on this and were planning to ask three architects to submit plans



Image ID 23250

But then on a cold February night in 1904, a disastrous fire damaged much of the building.



Image ID 23113

Upon examination of the ruins the commission decided that they would follow their original plan to remodel the building and incorporate whatever they could of the undamaged areas.. So they asked the three architects to submit their plans.

The commission picked the work of Cass Gillbert, who had just finished work on the Minnesota Capitol. However it was not approved by the legislature. One problem with the plan is that it placed the capitol fronting on Main Street...looking toward Lake Mendota. The people who lived on Monona Ave. (now Martin Luther King Blvd), Wilson and Doty streets thought that was fine...but the folks who lived on Langdon, State Street. Gilman or Gorham did not want the back door of the capitol on their side of the square.

Others got into the act. As long as the Capitol was so badly damaged, some said, it should not be rebuilt in Madison. It should go to Milwaukee, or Middleton or Portage or the Fox River Valley. All of these issues floated around the legislature like so many summer thunder clouds.



Image ID 102163

Finally, in 1905 the legislature gave the commission a new directive which was to build an entirely new capitol. After the plans of five architects were studied, the architect who received the commission was George Post of George B. Post and Sons in New York. (slide 8) Post was 72 years old at the time and knew this might be his last work... so he wanted it to be his masterpiece.



Image ID 131010

Several of the architects plans showed a cruciform shaped building with wings going out to the corners of the square. (this slide)
What may have won the commission for Post was the placement of the main entrances opening straight toward the sides of the Square. Everyone living in Madison could be happy that they were not at the back door and the capitol looked straight with the rest of the city.

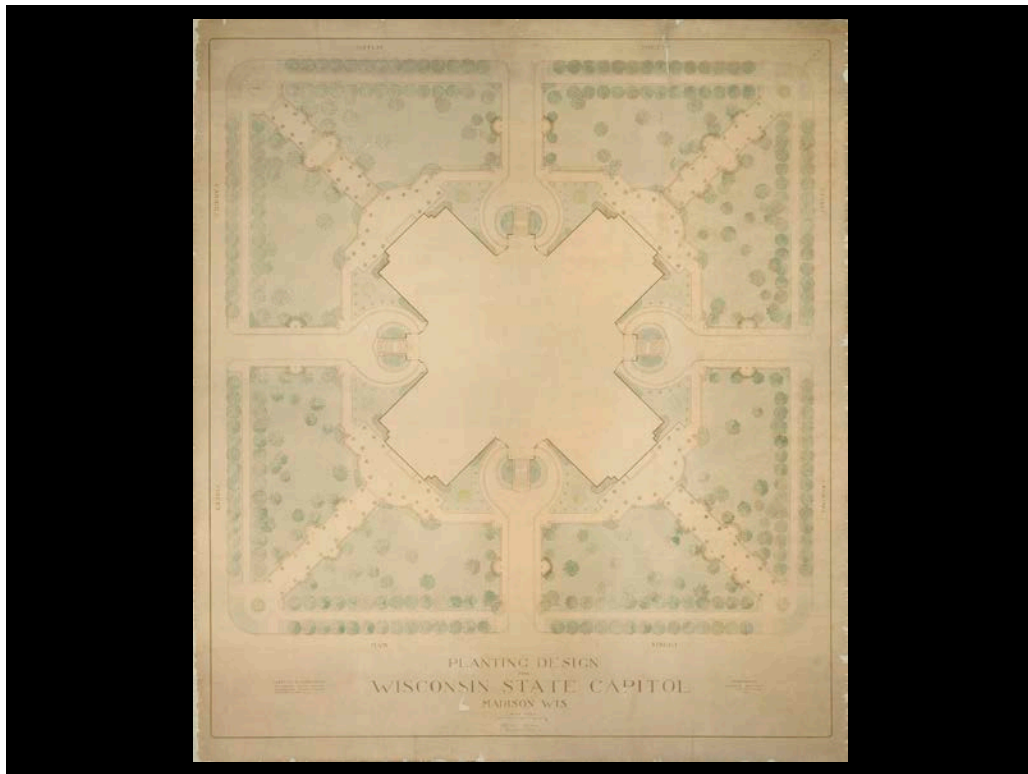


Image ID 5766

Diagram of capitol layout and surrounding park



Unknown source

The main entrances were intended to be at the top of grand, monumental staircases. If you would walk up these steps, you would enter the rotunda at the main floor level. However these stairs are hardly ever used. Instead we usually enter at the ground floor level under the porte-cocheres where the carriages used to drive.



Unknown source

Or the secondary entrances at the ends of the wings where you can see clear through the capitol 435 feet to the opposite entrance with no walls to block out that long vista, an unusual and beautiful feature.

Planning for construction took quite a while. Two years went by between the burning of the capitol and the final selection of Post as an architect. And actual ground-breaking, did not get under way until late fall of 1906, more 2 1/2 years after the fire.

Realizing that the state needed to house its various offices during construction, and wanting to spread out the payment for the capitol over a longer period of time, the legislature directed that the capitol be built one wing at a time. The undamaged and lightly damaged parts of the old building were fixed up and used for offices until they were torn down as each new wing was added

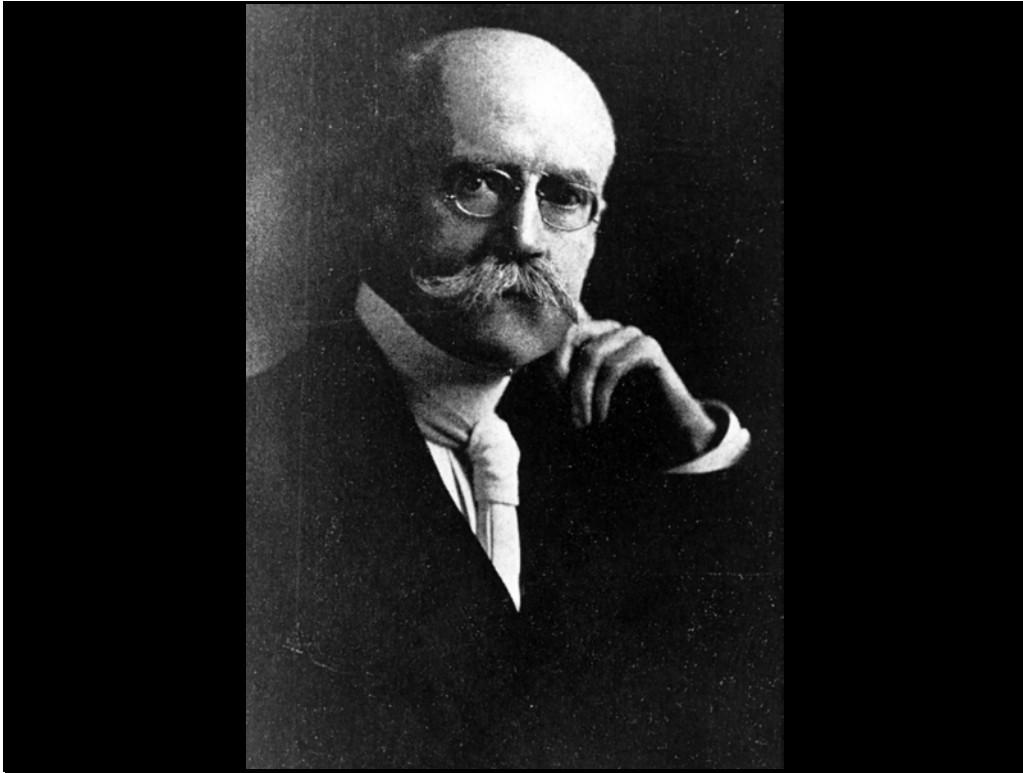


Image ID 10523

Construction started with the west wing, which houses the Assembly. The Commission selected Edwin Blashfield (slide 13) to paint the large mural in the assembly chamber. He was selected for three reasons

- (1) He was one of the foremost mural painters in the U.S.
- (2) He had had a lot of experience painting large murals, and
- (3) he was known for getting his work done on time! So it happened that when the State Assembly met in 1909, the wing was complete and Blashfield's mural was in place.



Image ID 4892

This is an allegorical painting meaning it has people representing things, events or ideas. Blashfield called it "Wisconsin, it's Past, Present and Future". You see Wisconsin as a woman seated on a throne in the bright part of the picture. Around her are three women who represent the three bodies of water surrounding Wisconsin. Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, and the Mississippi River. Off to the right are figures from Wisconsin's past: Civil War soldiers, a French fur trader, and Indians. In the center is Wisconsin's present, the woman pointing through the grove of trees across the lake to the new capitol and behind her a farmer, a lumberman, and a miner, who represented three important industries of that time. and behind them the shadowy figures of Wisconsin's future.



Unknown source

When the west wing was well underway in 1908, the builders started on the East Wing. This houses the governor's reception room and the supreme court. Governor La Follette had from the first suggested that the governor's reception room might take on some of the decorative features found in some of the historic buildings of the Old World. Colonel Vilas, who at that time was a member of the commission, thought that was a marvelous idea. So Mr. Post and the interior decorator went off to Europe to look at palaces for a model for the governor's reception room. They found their inspiration in the Doge's palace in Venice.

As you can see, the room is very ornate, having two huge marble fireplaces and paintings by artist Hugo Ballin, covering all four of the walls, as well as the ceiling. The paintings on the walls are historical..of people important in Wisconsin's history, such as Jean, Nicolet, landing at Green Bay. And Increase Lapham, known as the father of the weather bureau and Governor Harvey's widow, Cordelia Harvey who started a hospital in Madison for Civil War soldiers.

Although this room was highly praised, Grandmother said in her in talk "I suspect we in democratic Wisconsin, much as we appreciate the magnificent reception room, have the feeling that the art of a European palace is not suited to us and to our building. It is un-American!"

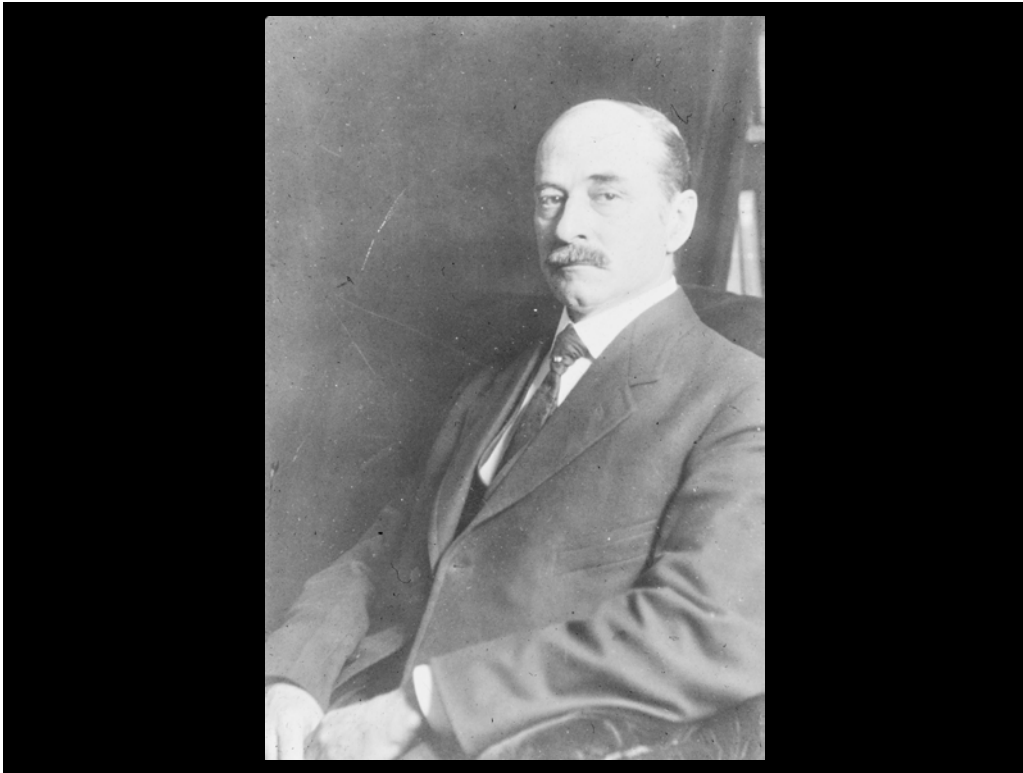


Unknown source

Directly above this room is the supreme court chamber. In the courtroom of the old capitol, the seven judges sat at a bench, while on the wall over their heads hung large, ornately framed portraits of former justices. Justice Marshall, who was on the Capitol Commission, wanted to have these portraits hung in the new courtroom. Mr. Post, who, you remember was building his finest monumental work, did not want these portraits to spoil the muraled beauty he had planned for the new courtroom.

A debate went on for some time, but in a master stroke, Mr. Post showed he was as skillful a diplomat as he was an architect. Two letters from Mr. Post demonstrate this skill. The first he wrote to Grandfather saying "I have found a way to make the paintings as unobjectionable and unobtrusive as possible." And to Justice Marshall, he wrote "I have found a way to hang the paintings so they will attract far greater attention and have far great value than could possibly have if hung in the courtroom itself.'

Where did they hang the portraits? Grandmother's script says "The vestibule to the courtroom is beautiful in it's paneling of Sienna Marble. In this vestibule are hung the portraits of deceased judges, appropriately, modestly and uniformly framed.



Unknown source

The way was now cleared for four murals to decorate the courtroom and it was Chief Justice Winslow who selected the subject of those murals. He said they should represent the four types of law upon which the justices of the Supreme Court base their decisions. The Chief Justice saw the murals in the courtroom as a chance to educate not only the young lawyers, but also the children and other citizens of Wisconsin who might visit the courtroom.

The first artist chosen to paint these murals was a well-known painter. However, before he could travel to Madison to discuss the project, he needed to go to Europe. Alas, the ship that he had booked passage on to return to the U.S. was the Titanic. Mr. Post next suggested that they turn to the young, but experienced Albert Herter. He was pleased to get the commission and you see his four murals in the courtroom today.

Slide 18

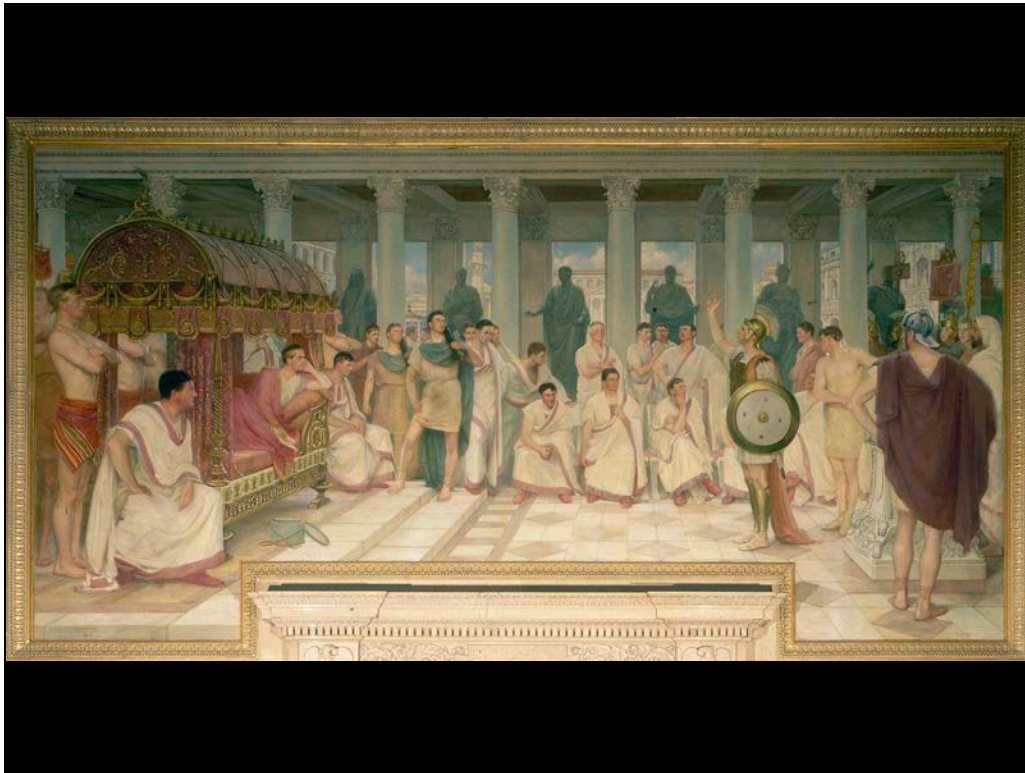


Image ID 44740

The first one "The Appeal of the Legionary to Augustus Caesar" represents Roman Law, Actually, Caesar was acting as the Legionary's defender and the trial is taking place before a jury of Roman citizens, representing the beginnings of jury trials.

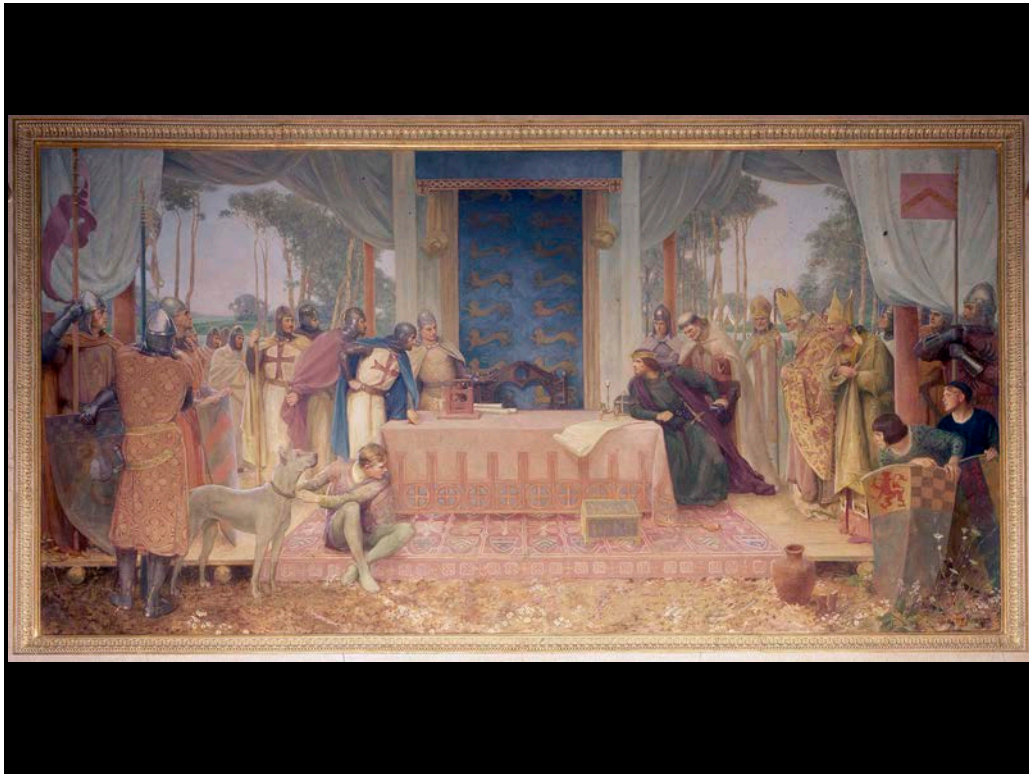


Image ID 45106

The second mural shows an important moment in Anglo-Saxon law. The English barons are staring down the table at King John, who is glaring back at them before signing the Magna Carta. Here was the great beginning, the first step down the long road to English Constitutional monarchy and the forebear of many laws and customs the early English settlers brought to America. The artist used his son, Christian Herter as the model for the boy with the dog. Christian grew up to be Secretary of the State under President Eisenhower.



Image ID 44741

American law is represented in the mural that hangs behind the justices. It shows "The Signing of the Constitution". Benjamin Franklin stands with two other men on the left. James Madison, with his coat over his arm, and Alexander Hamilton make up a group on the right. Thomas Jefferson is standing back by the desk. This is artistic license; Jefferson was in France as the U.S. Ambassador at the time the Constitution was signed. George Washington, at the desk is looking unusually relaxed.

The artist was showing him as not a king, but a private citizen who would be president for only a term of years.

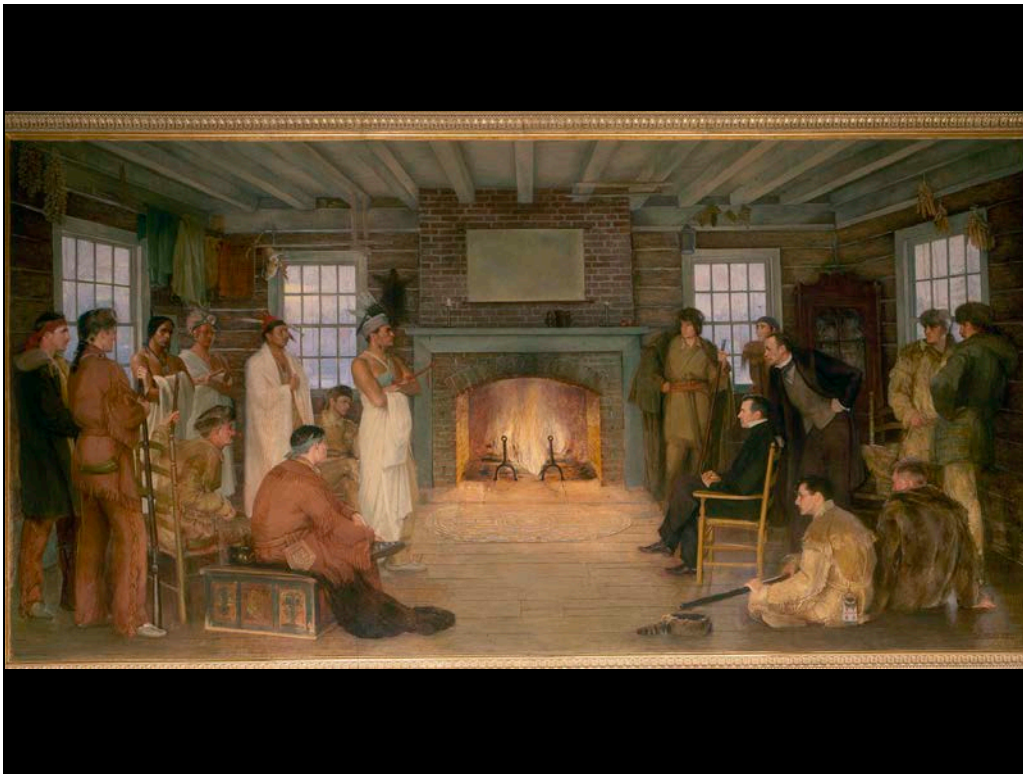


Image ID 45105

The final mural is of Wisconsin law, and it shows Chief Oshkosh being tried in a log cabin before Judge James Duane Doty. Chief Oshkosh defended himself on the basis of Indian law and won his case.



Unknown source

However there was another problem...the Supreme Court justices complained about the placement of the doors at the ends of the bench. Post wrote to Grandfather, "We are sorry to say that it would absolutely spoil the design of the room to introduce a door in back of the bench. We think the judges will have to be subjected to the inconvenience of taking a few additional steps to reach the doors provided."

By 1910 the East Wing was nearly finished and the South Wing housing the Senate Chamber was begun. The chamber, a beautiful circular room, was modeled after one in the Massachusetts State House. The walls of creamy yellow marble give it a warm glow under the sky light.

The desks of the 33 senators were not individual but connected in groups of four or six and arranged in two semicircles. If Post thought he had troubles with the 7 justices, he really raised a hornet's nest with the 33 senators. From the beginning his plans had showed this desk arrangement and a committee of senators agreed to it, but when the time came to install the desks, the senators were incensed. They wanted individual desks.

Finally, after more grumbling and growling from the Senate, the commissioners were heartily sick of it all and directed the desks to be installed according to the original plan.



Unknown source

When the senators look at the front of the room they see a mural in three panels. The artist, Kenyon Cox had painted an event that was current news at that time: the opening of the Panama Canal. Allegorically we see it as the wedding of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

In the center, America is on the throne blessing the union of the two oceans. The Atlantic is represented by Neptune and he is placing a ring on the hand of a Goddess who represents the Pacific



Image ID 3482

Next it was time to work on the rotunda and dome. Originally Post had planned to use channeled limestone, or possibly reinforced cement to build the supports for the dome, but in 1909 Post wrote to Grandfather

“Since we started to complete the drawing for the dome I became so thoroughly impressed with the magnitude of the work as an engineering consideration - on account of its height and dimensions, the great concentrated loads in the lower portion, the large wind stresses and enormous variation of temperature between the interior and exterior of all that part above the roof line of the building - that I deemed it necessary to start anew and verify every figure and every provision.”

Two months later, after a thorough review of the tests and figures, he wrote that he felt the best material for the dome would be structural steel - and reiterated “I do not see how it is possible that we could say more emphatically in person to the Executive Committee than we have said in our letters - that we believe that the change which we recommend in introducing the heavy structural steel construction in place of the structural masonry is essential to the stability of the building.”

This photo shows the rotunda under construction with the dome- shaped structural steel beams in place.

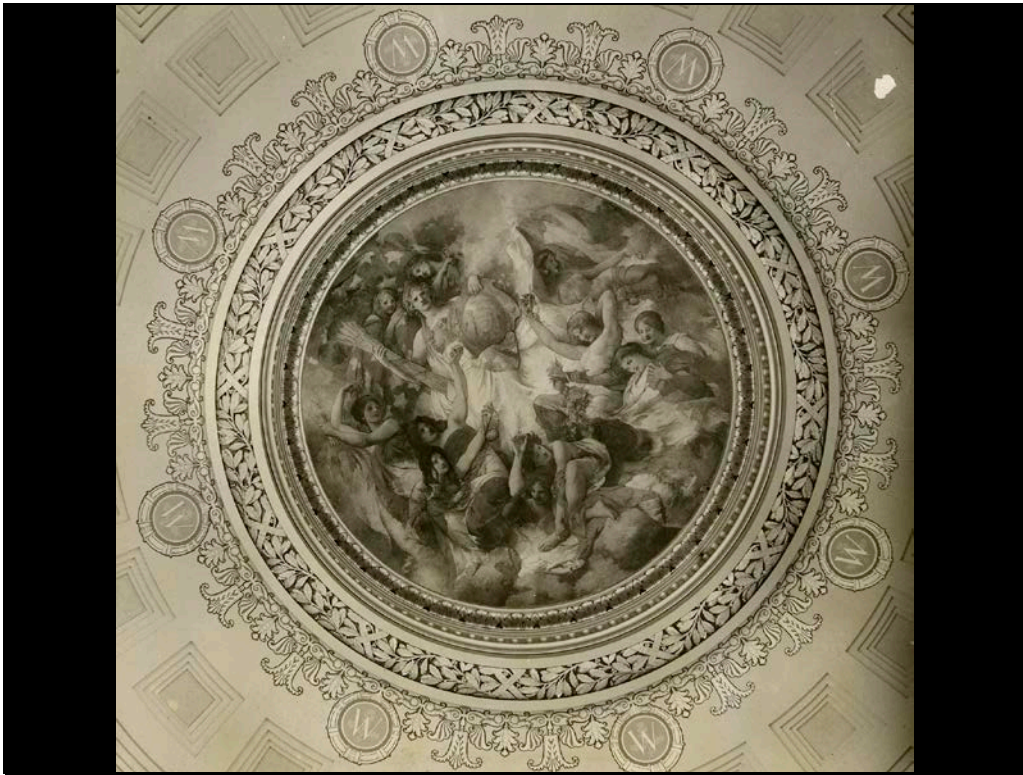


Image ID 131016

Three years later, when the rotunda and dome were finished, the painting to go inside the “eye of the dome” had already been completed for more than a year. The artist, Edwin Blashfield, who had also painted the Assembly mural, wrote to Grandmother that this mural represents Wisconsin wrapped in the folds of the American Flag, and around her are figures holding up the products of our state.

Today, as we stand on the ground floor and look at this painting from 250 feet below, we have no idea how large it is. It actually covers a space in the eye of the dome that is equal to the size of the rotunda floor within the railing...34 feet in diameter. In addition to its large size, the mural had another problem that most ceiling murals do not have..... the space for it was not flat but was shaped like a bowl. Putting a rectangular piece of canvas into a bowl shape would leave wrinkles, pleats and tucks.



Image ID 131073

His method of solving this one was to build a bowl, 7 feet in diameter. (slide 26) And then he painted smaller cutouts of various parts of the painting such as heads or arms which he arranged rather like a jigsaw puzzle until he got the effect he wanted. Then he worked it out full sized from this model.



Image ID 131074

The only room in New York City with proper lighting and space large enough for Blashfield and helpers to work on a 34 foot painting was the Vanderbilt Gallery in the Fine Arts building. When the mural was finished, it was cut, with the paint still fresh, Grandmother said, into sections. Then they were rolled up, placed in boxes and sent to Wisconsin. Here the pieces were spread out and allowed to dry. Then they were rerolled, put in heavy burlap bags, re-crated and stored in the corridors of the capitol until they could be installed.

When that time came, a scaffold was erected, and Blashfield's assistants came to Wisconsin to supervise the installation, touch up the seams and put a coat of wax on the decoration.



Unknown source

Where the circular dome meets the octagonal rotunda, there are four somewhat trapezoidal shapes - decorated with glass mosaics and called the pendentives. These are twelve feet high, and about twenty four feet long. The artist, Kenyon Cox, supervised the installation of the 400,000 pieces of glass in them. Each shows a seated figure, surrounded by a circular border. The four figures are intended, Cox wrote Grandmother, to symbolize liberty, the foundations of all power in a free country and the three divisions of state power - the legislative, executive and judicial powers.

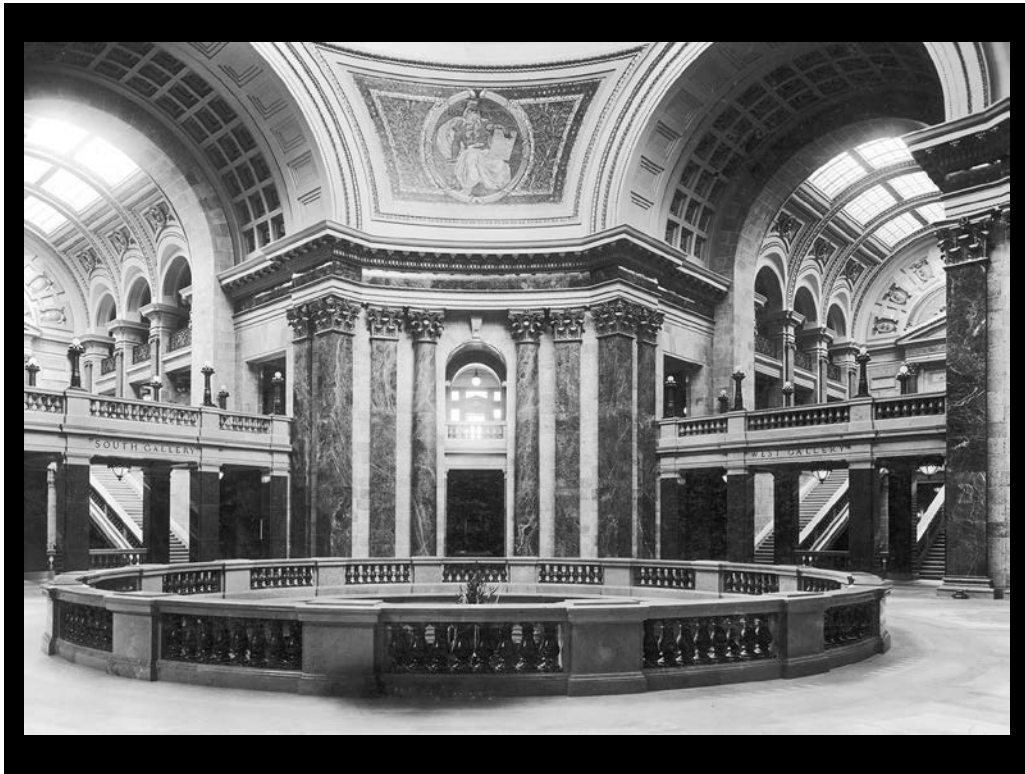


Image ID 7051

Besides the imposing architecture, one of the great glories of the Capitol interior is the stone work of all different colors. The main decorative stone is the beautiful golden Kasota limestone from Minnesota. And there are five different colors and kinds of granite from Wisconsin. In addition, there is marble from five states, as well as from Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Germany and Algeria. Sixteen piers supporting the first floor gallery in the rotunda were a gift from the King of Norway.

Post worked with all these colors and stones with the eye and confidence of a painter. He took great pains to make sure that each type and color of stone fit into the big picture, But there were some setbacks. For instance, in 1908 he wrote to grandfather that grey Tennessee would be most satisfactory for the Assembly Chamber lobby...but it was prohibited by Colonel Vilas, because it had been used in the toilet rooms. So it is Botticino marble from Italy that we see on the walls of the Assembly lobby today.



Image ID 131018

Originally the Commission, because of cost constraints, thought they would use limestone for the outside of the building. Post who was always conscious of building his great masterpiece, cautiously agreed, but in the same letter he said. "Limestone, when it is new, is fine, but it loses a great part of its charm by the very bad color to which it weathers; in other words it gets very dirty with a very ugly color of dirt. Marble as a veneer would also work, but it sometimes cracks."

The solution to this quandary came in the form of Hardwick White Granite from Bethel, Vermont. They chose it because it was as white as marble and could be used in thick pieces so there would be no problem with cracking. The granite would be quarried in Bethel, and each stone cut, trimmed to size and labeled, so that the pieces could be put together in the right places on the Capitol building. The final finishing and installation in Madison would be done by men sent from the Vermont quarry.

But there were problems with this very large and involved project. At the beginning, the Vermont quarry wrote that they couldn't send estimates because, the man who was going to do the figuring drowned recently in New York. And then after the first shipment arrived in Madison a month late, letters from Bethel apologized for the slow start. They were having a hard time getting enough railroad cars and also had to track a missing train which turned up in Buffalo, N.Y.

And there were other problems, including a six week strike of granite cutters and problems with a water power plant during a time of severe drought. They needed the plant because it generated electricity for all their machinery.

Lastly when the final wing was being built, they found the new granite did not match the stone on the adjoining West Wing, the first section to be built. The manager of the quarry answered that complaint by saying that granite just out of the ground is not going to look the same as the granite that has weathered for six years. It seems he must have been right.



Image ID 4907

The outside of the Capitol has its artwork too. Sculptures decorate the pediments at the ends of the Roman temple-like wings. Those on the east and west pediments were done by Karl Bitter, who Grandmother said was one of the most interesting people who worked on the Capitol. She told his story as Karl had told her...

He was born in Vienna, the son of a small businessman. Karl started at the Gymnasium when he was nine and hated the academic curriculum, but discovered that he liked and had an aptitude for painting. At 14, against his father's wishes but with his mother's blessing, he left the Gymnasium and went to art school. There he found himself in a sculpture class by accident, and discovered his profession.

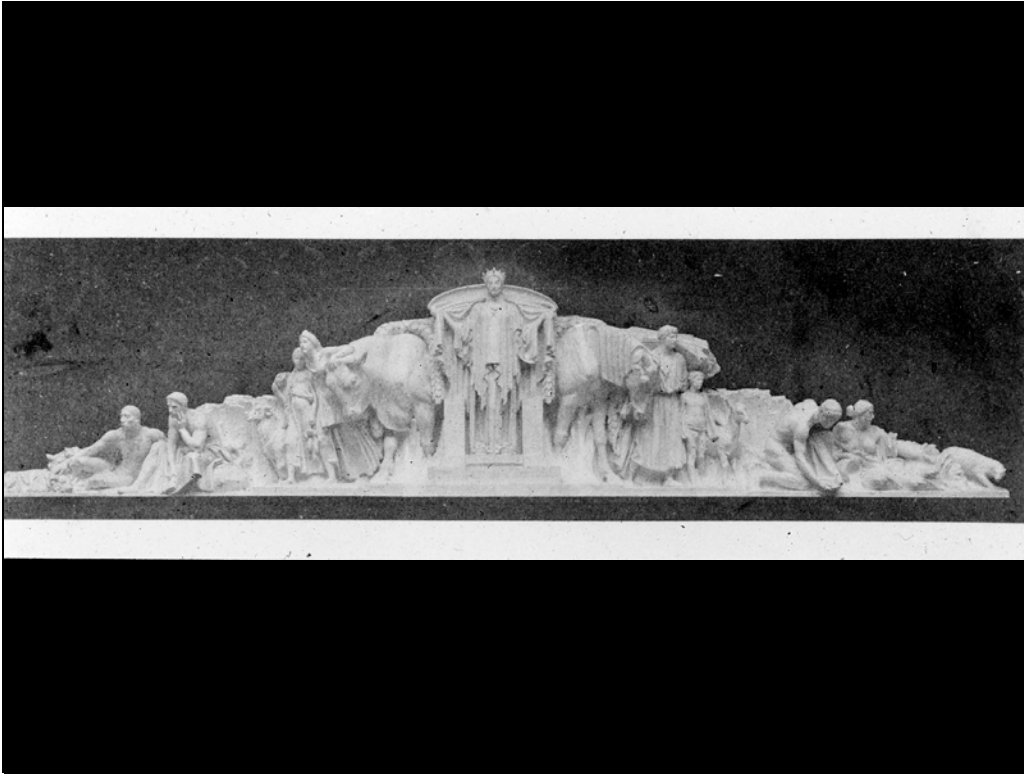
Vienna in the 1880's was a wonderful place for a budding sculptor, for the government was building big new buildings full of monumental and decorative sculpture. And students had opportunities to do cuttings on new sculptures and work hand in hand with people who were designing them.

At age 20, Bitter had nearly finished his education, when he was drafted into the Austrian army for a term of three years. While on leave after the first year, he decided it was time to go to the United States. A friend arranged passage on a boat, and Bitter arrived in New York with only the clothes on his back, his stonecutting tools, a German-English dictionary, and a few dollars. But he also owned the benefit of superb training in Vienna.

New York in the 1890's was as good as Vienna in the 1880's, because the Astors, Vanderbilts, and others were building large, ostentatious mansions in the city and colossal "cottages" in Newport. On his first day in New York, Bitter was hired by a company making decorative sculpture for buildings. Within a few weeks, he was noticed by Richard Morris Hunt, one of the great New York architects. Soon this young man was so busy working for Hunt that only one other architect, George Post, was able to take advantage of his great abilities.

Although his final works were in stone, Bitter began by making quarter size or half size clay models. From those, he made molds and plaster casts. Out of these, models were made for the final, full-size sculpture.

Since the Assembly Chamber is in the West Wing, Bitter wrote Grandmother, he thought of this wing as the most representative of the people and resources of the state and he wanted to show those on the pediment.



Unknown source

Wisconsin stands in the center, throwing back her mantle to exhibit her beauty and wealth. A cow, a horse, and a sheep represent our agriculture. On the right a man pulls fish out of a river. On the left a man with an ax represents the forest industries. This particular pediment was carved in a shed on the Capitol grounds and then lifted up into place in 1909.

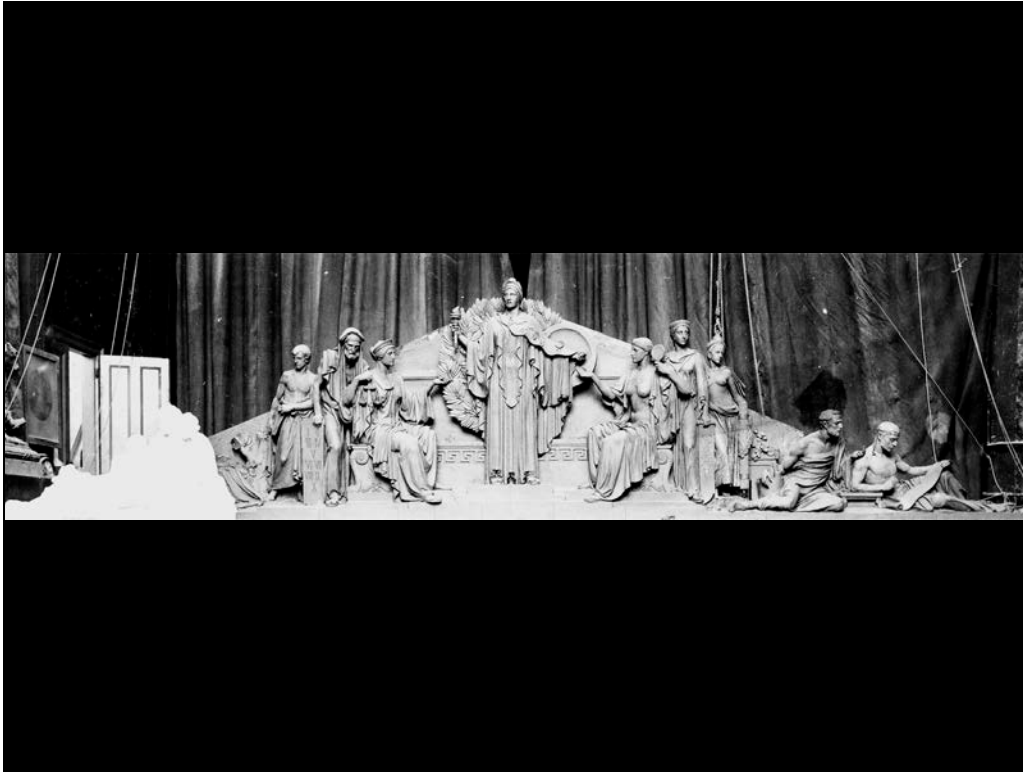


Image ID 131076

On the East Wing home of the Supreme Court, Bitter carved his pediment to represent the law. In the center of the pediment stands Liberty. To the newly-arrived immigrants from Europe, it was a glorious idea, and these Capitol artists and sculptors used it continually. Seated next to Liberty on our right is Truth holding a mirror and nearby a mother and daughter carry the Magna Carta. At the end of the pediment are men studying laws which codify the basic ideas of right and wrong.

Seated next to Liberty on our left is Justice holding scales. Behind Justice are a father and son holding the Ten Commandments, and the part that we see, already done in plaster, shows a mother and her children, representing the beginnings of law when we learn right from wrong, good and evil, at our mother's knee.



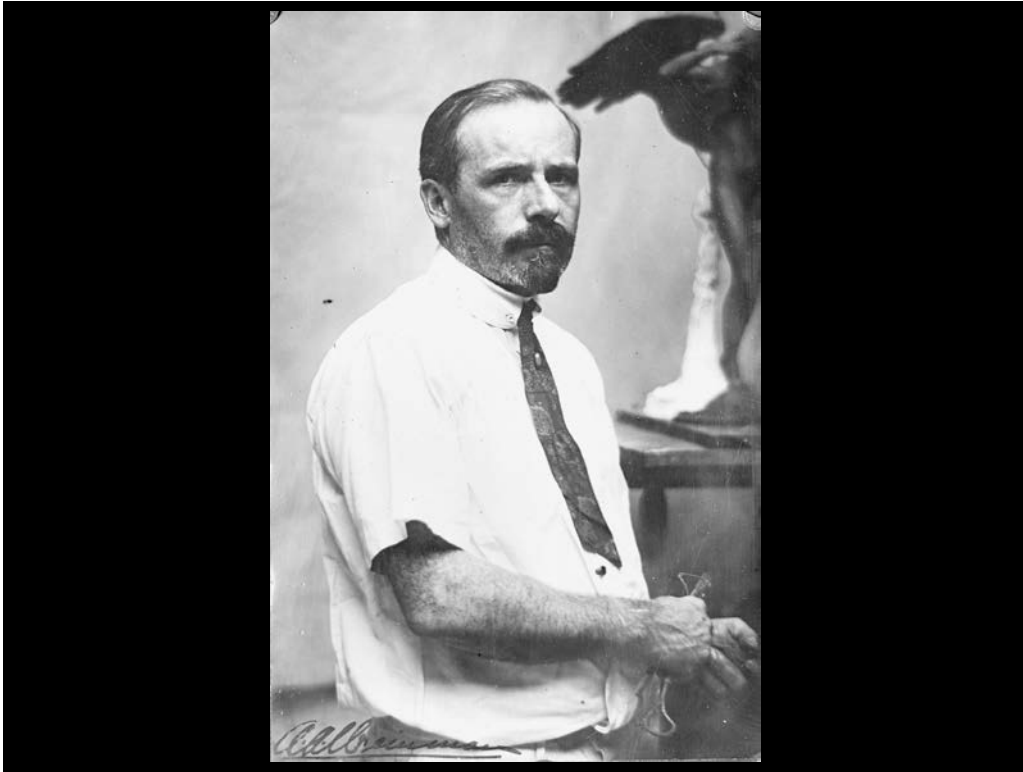


Image ID 10574

The South Wing pediment was done by German-born Adolph Weinman. He also sculptured the Lincoln statue that stands in front of Bascom hall on the UW campus.

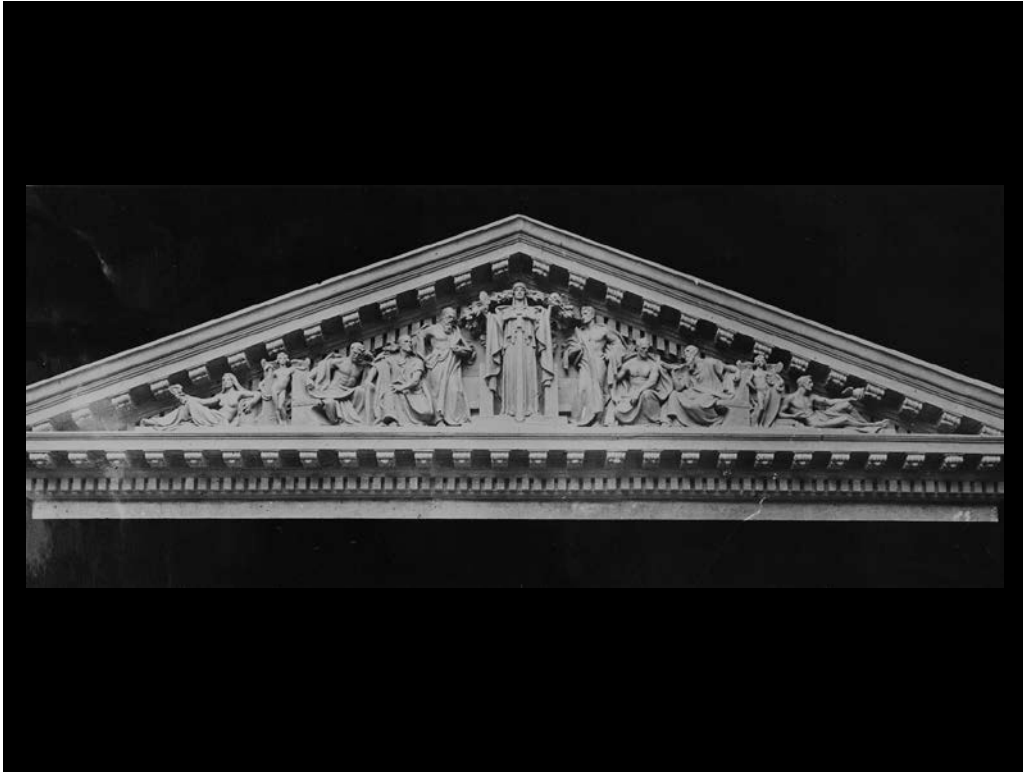


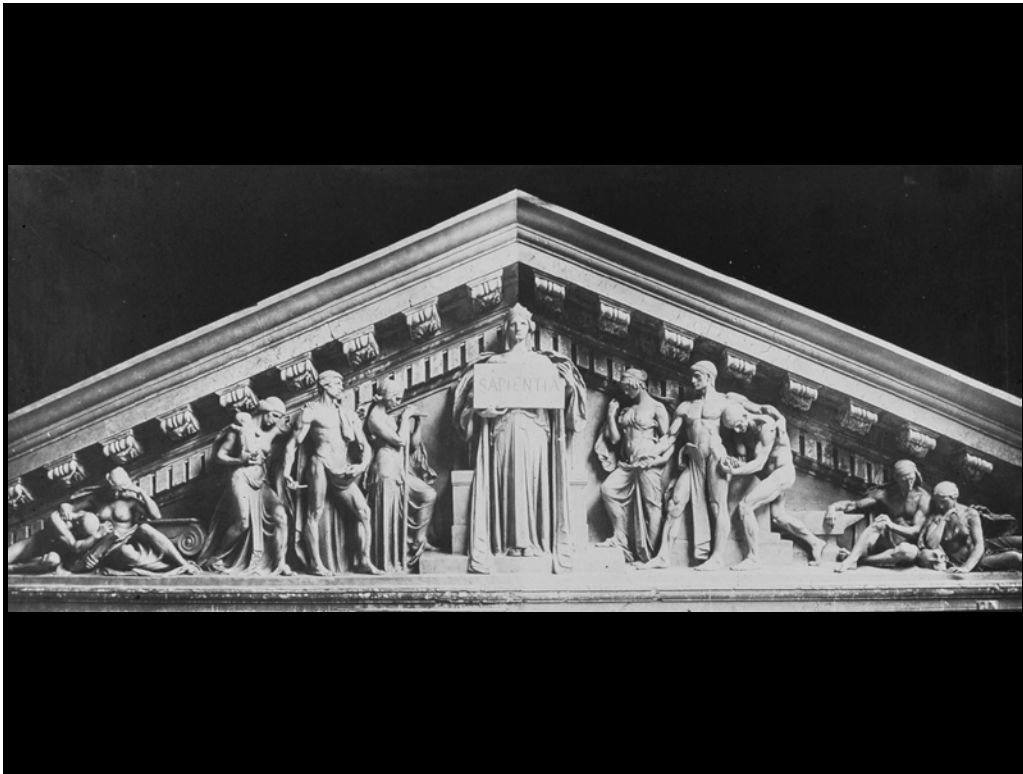
Image ID 7032

In his letter to Grandmother, Weinman said that he wanted the south wing pediment to show such powers as should dominate so important a body as the Senate of a great state". Wisdom stands in the center holding a winged skull representing thought and a mirror representing reflection. To the left are figures representing the qualities of equality, power, meditation, and prudence. On the right the qualities of rectitude, diplomacy, eloquence, and progress. Such fine ideals!



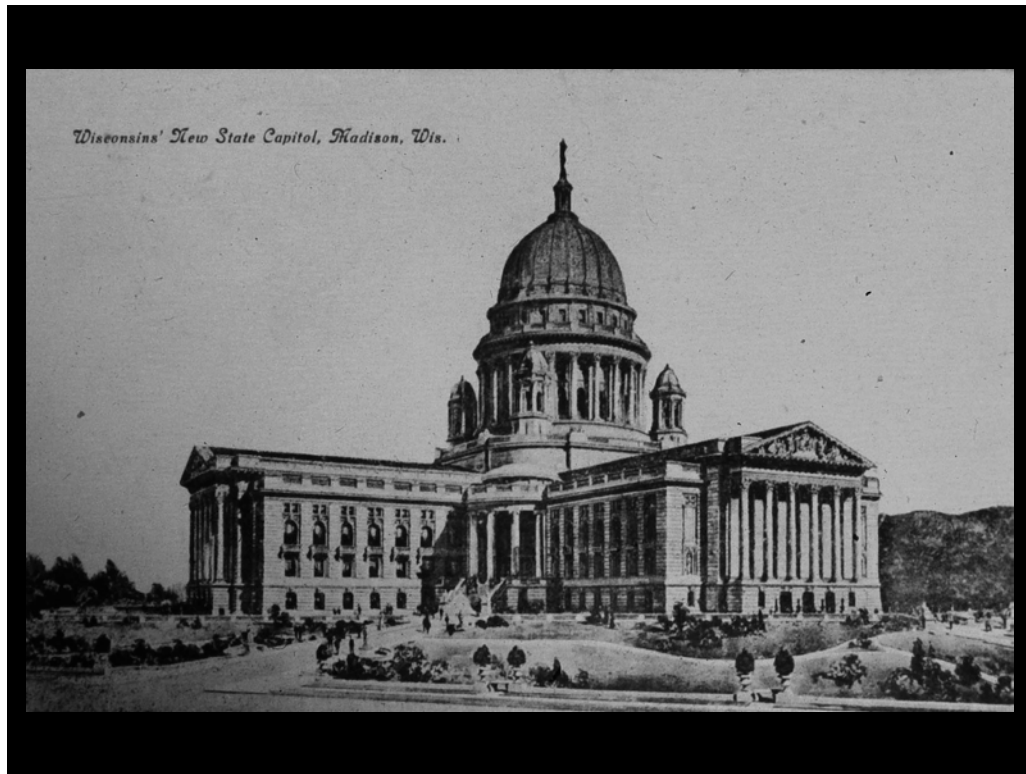
Image ID 10525

An Italian, Attilio Piccirilli was the sculptor for the North Wing pediment. He came to the US with his family when he was 20. He told grandmother, "I have given most of the last two years to the pediment for your state capitol and hope to have the model finished shortly. This work, I dare say, will be my best work; it will represent "Learning" - summing up all I have learned in art.



Unknown source

The central figure, representing enlightenment, holds a tablet. Other figures represent music, poetry, art, the sciences, geometry, and philosophy.



Unknown source

Post's original design for the capitol had tourelles, or little towers, over the four main entrances. In the course of construction, he changed the plan for towers into 4 sculpture groups. Each of the groups has a standing figure, flanked by two seated figures.

Karl Bitter who did two of the pediments, was also the sculptor for the groups. Bitter, who didn't start speaking English until he was 22, wrote a beautiful letter telling Grandmother what was in his mind as he sculpted these groups. He said each represented a quality needed to carve a civilized state out of a wilderness.



Image ID 9570

Here we see Italian carvers, hired by Karl Bitter, working on the granite sculptures for the four groups. Two of the statues, the one holding a sword and the seated man next to him, are for the first group, which shows the quality of strength.

In his letter Bitter describes the four groups thus. "By strength, I have in mind virility, manhood and physical force; chief requirements of a people that shall be called progressive. I also have in mind the fact that the state has taken part in the great military struggles of our country and has lent its powerful arm to fight in it's battles."

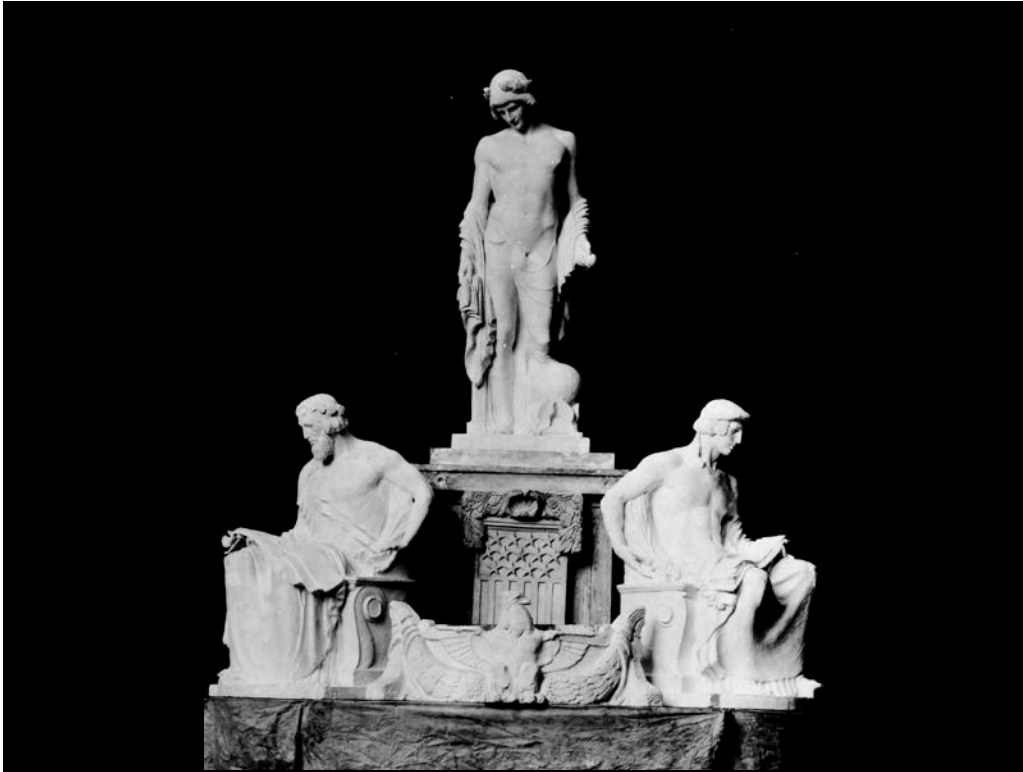


Image ID 131079

The second group shows wisdom, the quality needed to use strength judiciously. A wisdom that is based upon knowledge of past experiences, fostered by institutions of learning. The standing man is contemplating a globe and the two seated men are absorbed in a book or scroll.



Image ID 7055

In choosing faith for one of the groups I point to the religious life of the community... which is of equal importance with any other phase of man's aspirations and efforts. It is the broadest word I can find to cover the existence of a soul, and it's hopes and fears."



Image ID 131079

Lastly I speak of 'Prosperity and Abundance'. In this I refer to that hope of success- which stimulates wealth and earthly welfare. The fruits of which come as a result of the other qualities I have mentioned.

Here you see the clay model for wealth, or abundance and here you see how it looks on the capitol, carved into the obdurate granite, as Bitter called it.

These figures were carved in a shed down by the Milwaukee Road depot on West Washington Avenue from the granite brought here by train to that depot. Then they were carried up to the capitol on flatcars pulled by mules and lifted into place.



Image ID 2902

The final piece of exterior art was referred to for many years as “the figure surmounting the dome.” Post had invited Wisconsin-born Helen Farnsworth Mears to make a model for this figure. Although considered a fine sculptor she had never done anything just like this before. Helen worked for a year and a half on her model, and then pictures of it were sent to the building commission.



Image ID 10588

They were rather dumbfounded at what they saw. Commissioner Johnson wrote “it’s lucky we put such strong piers into the dome” because “The dame may look like a fairy when she’s up in the air, but there’s nothing to indicate it now” Post admitted it was “somewhat deficient in silhouette, which is most important, as you remember that it is seen at a height of about 250 feet above the ground.” The commission decided to pay her for her work and ask someone else.

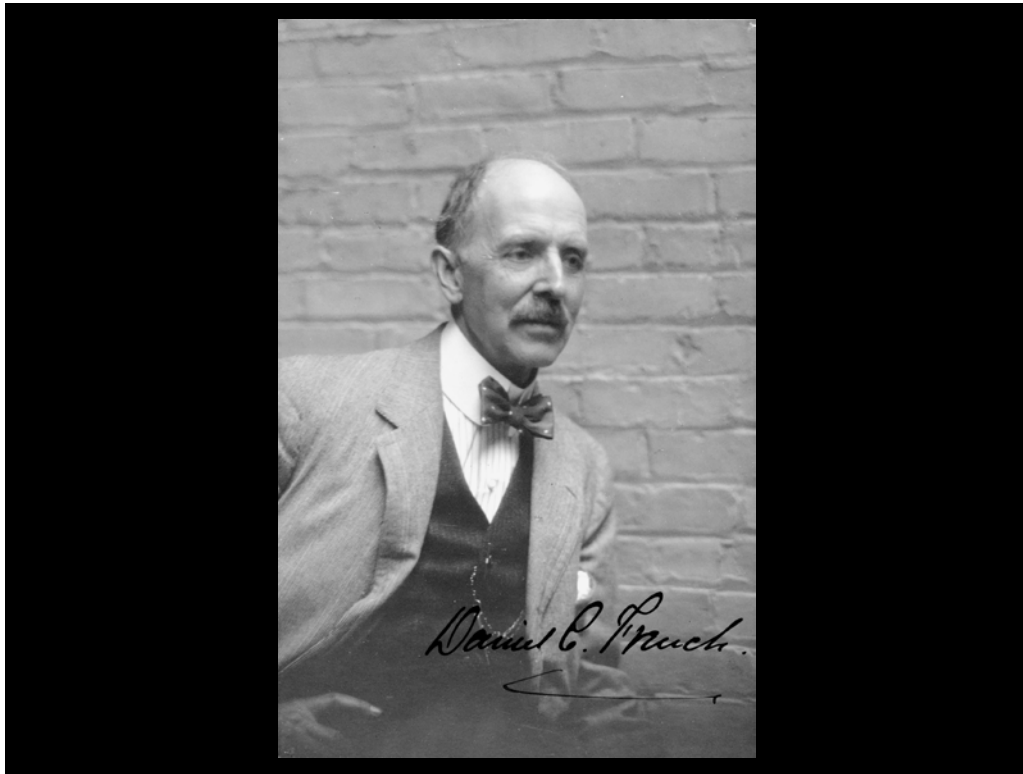


Image ID 10550

That person was Daniel Chester French. He was experienced and highly successful with art of this type. Today we know him for the statue of the Minute Man at Concord, and Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Grandmother told her listeners "It is interesting to know that Mr. French built a temporary studio on the Hudson cliffs where, some 200 feet above the valley he worked and modeled his figure so that he might judge its proportions and attitude from a proper distance below." but then she went on to say this about the statue.



Image ID 131012

"It is a chaste, graceful, and beautiful figure. We wish, however, that Mr. French might have spent some time in Wisconsin among our progressive, intelligent and enthusiastic citizens who have the true spirit of our motto Forward. Had he done so, there might have been more action in the attitude, the face more eager, and the whole figure more forcibly suggestive of our motto, forward." Here may be the genesis of the nickname "Forward" for the statue, although it was called "Wisconsin" by French and the architects.

Originally, "Wisconsin" was supposed to be a bronze statue. French had made a cast from a clay model and then the statue was cast in bronze. But it sat in the foundry for some time after it was done and the bronze became discolored. Mr. French in trying to salvage it, had it gold leafed and sent the commission a bill for the extra expense.

Grandfather was forced to write back that the commissioners would not approve the bill, since they had not originally asked for it. Mr. French replied in a gentlemanly fashion, "Thank you for your kind attention to my letter about the gliding. It is evident that this is one of those things that are viewed from such a different stand-point by the people interested that it is impossible to adjust it to the satisfaction of all. We will let the matter drop and rejoice in the successful conclusion of the work"



Image ID 102166

Wisconsin was crated and sent on a flat car to Madison. To put it up, it was hoisted to the roof of one of the wings, and the crate was removed before lifting it up to the top of the dome. Then the question was asked, "What direction should she face?" Some thought she should face east down King Street, toward the railroad stations, which was the way most visitors came into town in those days. However, although Post had died by this time, his sons said that his father always thought of the southeast entrance, the one facing toward Lake Monona, as being the main entrance with the most interesting vista. Mr. French agreed that the light on the statue would be best from that angle, so today there she stands facing out toward Lake Monona.



Image ID 122057

Here is a photograph of "Wisconsin" on top of the capitol.

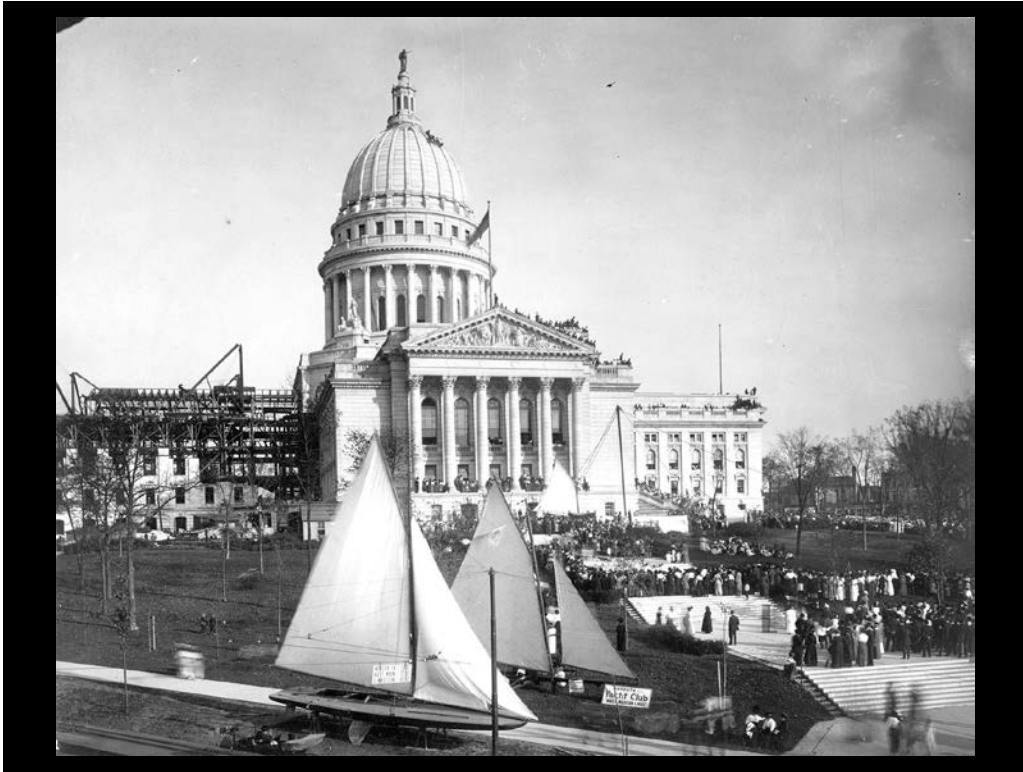


Image ID 3482

In 1914, even before the capitol was finished, people enjoyed the capitol and planned fairs and festivals around it the way the builders and state leaders hoped they would. These leaders wanted the capitol to become the background for community and civic functions. They would have been pleased with the Farmers Market, the Art Fair on the square, the Taste of Madison and all the other events that take place against that backdrop. All of these occasions give people a chance to be close to and take in the message of what Grandmother called “the great stone symbol of our democracy.”

Grandmother ended her talk, “Throughout history the great, decorated public buildings have been one of the most valuable assets of a nation: the stimulus of the indifferent, the educator of the ignorant, the teacher of esthetics, morals and patriotism. Such we trust may be the influence of our new Capitol.”

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following staff and volunteers from the Wisconsin Historical Society for their skills and time.

- Andy Kraushaar
- Mary Murphy
- Marge Lyford
- Dennis Reece