

Michigan Time Traveler

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center

The Mystery of the Muses

Why are there paintings of women in the Capitol's dome, and who made them? This month's Time Traveler follows the history detectives who figured it all out.

Kids' History

The Mystery

Michigan's Capitol building celebrates its 125th anniversary this year. Hundreds of thousands of visitors admire its grandeur and look up to see the beautiful paintings in its dome. However, when the Capitol opened in 1879, the walls were bare. All the money to build the Capitol had been spent. Six years later the legislature funded a project to decorate the walls and dome.

A *Lansing State Republican* reporter suggested that scenes of Michigan pioneer life be painted in the dome. Capitol architect Elijah E. Myers had specified that the smooth metal panels in the dome be painted with "ornamental allegorical paintings." The state hired William Wright's Detroit company to decorate the building. Wright followed the architect's instructions.

The result was eight muses representing agriculture, arts, astronomy/science, commerce, education, industry, justice, and law. The artist signed some of the murals, not with his name, but with a drawing. His name was not even written in state records.

The Paintings

The paintings of the muses have two basic elements. First, the figure (muse) in each picture is a woman dressed in ancient Greek style. (The original Muses were part of Greek mythology.)

Second, each painting is allegorical: the muse holds—and may be surrounded by—objects that are used to tell the story of its theme. For example, the Muse of Agriculture painted by Juglaris holds a shovel, wears a crown of wheat, and has crops at her feet.

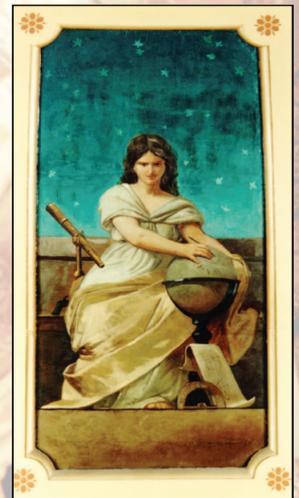
If you visit the U. S. Capitol in Washington, you can see allegorical paintings representing subjects including "Geography," "History," "Liberty," "Peace," "Physics" and "Telegraph." Constantino Brumidi, an Italian artist who became an American citizen in 1852, painted them during the 1860s. Elijah Myers may have been inspired by these paintings when he recommended similar murals for his design of Michigan's Capitol.



Agriculture



Arts



Astronomy/Science



Commerce



Law



Justice



Industry



Education

Discovering the Artist

The Capitol's pediment includes two figures dressed like the muses in the rotunda. Lewis Ives designed the pediment. For many years people thought that he also painted the murals in the dome. Kerry Chartkoff, Director of the Capitol Tour and Information Service and Capitol historian, suspected that Ives was not the artist. She tried to learn the real identity of the painter, but no one knew.

Then, one day in 1992, Geoffrey Drutchas of Taylor, Michigan, visited the Capitol. He had read that Italian artist Tommaso Juglaris had done some work for the Michigan Capitol. He asked a Capitol tour guide about paintings by Juglaris.

Not recognizing the artist's name, the guide took Drutchas to talk to Ms. Chartkoff. They wondered if the murals in the dome might be the Juglaris paintings. Both began learning more about Juglaris and his art. The drawing used to sign the Capitol's painting looked like a stick figure of a person, so they looked for this image on other Juglaris paintings.

Drutchas visited Italy in 2000 and found the same drawing on a known Juglaris painting. He learned that it was a monogram of the artist's initials: TJ. When a sketch of four of the Capitol's muses was found among Juglaris's papers in Italy in 2003, it confirmed Juglaris as the painter. The case was closed, the artist was discovered. But why had his name been such a mystery for so many years?

Tommaso Juglaris immigrated to the United States from Italy in 1880. He lived and worked in Boston. The Capitol's paintings were probably painted on canvas there, then shipped to Lansing and glued onto the rotunda walls in 1886.

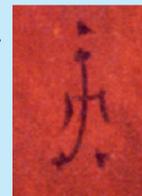
When Juglaris came to Boston there were great numbers of immigrants coming to this nation. Some people feared that they would take jobs away from American citizens. Noncitizens could not work on public buildings or projects. Juglaris had been hired by William Wright's company as a subcontractor. Wright or Michigan officials might have decided that it was politically best not to identify him.

Things to Do

- Choose a modern subject for a muse, perhaps the environment, computer technology or cell phones. Draw the muse, adding objects from modern times that help tell her story.
- Go to Michigan's Capitol building, stand in the rotunda and look up to see the original paintings.
- See the allegorical paintings in the U. S. Capitol on the Web at www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/brumidi/.
- Teachers, find lessons for this page and previous "Michigan Time Traveler" pages online in PDF format at www.michigan.gov/timetraveler.
- Comments or suggestions? Write to TimeTraveler@michigan.gov.



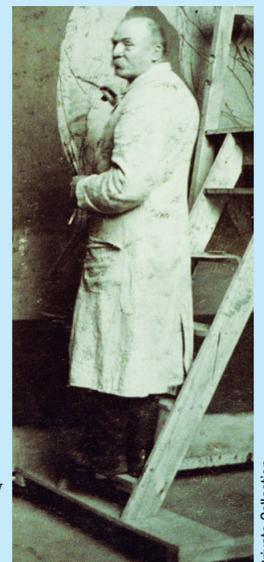
Anna poses as the Muse of Agriculture in the exhibit's activity area. Paul, a fourth grader at St. Joseph Catholic School in St. Johns, portrays the Muse of Arts as he sketches his sister.



Dietrich Floeter



Private Collection



Tommaso Juglaris

Private Collection

Photo of dome: Michigan Department of Transportation



At the Michigan Historical Museum

- Visit the special exhibit, *Tommaso Juglaris: A Capitol Artist*, on the museum's first floor today through January 9, 2005. See full-size reproductions of each painting close-up plus other works by Juglaris that have come here from Moncalieri, Italy. The Michigan Historical Museum, 702 W. Kalamazoo Street, is located two blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing. Museum admission is free. Hours: Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; Sunday, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. The museum telephone hotline: (517) 373-3559. The museum is part of the Michigan Historical Center, Department of History, Arts and Libraries. Visit us on the Web at www.michiganhistory.org.



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