

BRUMIDI PAINTINGS FOUND IN WASHINGTON AFTER A SEARCH OF FORTY YEARS

TWO large boxes, containing twenty-seven oil paintings of various sizes, belonging to the estate of the late Constantino Brumidi, the eminent artist of Capitol fame, were found in Washington the other day after having been lost for thirty years.

These art treasures were lost in 1879 and found in 1919 at one of the busiest and most prominent street corners in Washington, a block distant from the White House and still closer to the United States Treasury.

In 1879 Brumidi made the following will, which was filed, but never probated. He died the next year:

In the name of God, Amen.

I, Constantino Brumidi, of No. 921 G Street, Washington, D. C., make this my last will.

I give, devise and bequeath all my estate and property, real and personal, to my boy, named, called and known by the name of Lawrence S. Brumidi, as follows, that is to say:

All engravings, works of art, paintings and apparatus pertaining thereto that I now or may hereafter possess; all designs, sketches

whose health has been for some time such as to necessitate hospital attention.

During the lifetime of Mrs. Brumidi, she informed Executor Schwartz that her husband's paintings, sketches, etc., were in storage somewhere, but had no idea as to just where.

After endless searching among all the old warehouses of the city and diligently inquiring among all of the old settlers whom he imagined might have been familiar with the affairs of the Brumidi family, Mr. Schwartz went into the National Savings and Trust Company, at the corner of 15th street and New York avenue, where he entered into a casual conversation with his friend, J. M. Boteler, in charge of the vault and safe deposit departments of that institution. After they had discussed finances, politics, strikes, prohibition and the rapid approach of Thanksgiving, Mr. Schwartz, apropos of nothing, remarked that he wished he could locate those Brumidi

painting found was that of an exact duplicate of the great painting in the dome of the Capitol. It is altogether probable that the artist painted this picture first and then used it as a model during the years he worked in the dome. It is in a splendid state of preservation.

Two large portraits of Brumidi's American wife (he was twice married before leaving Italy), in heavy gold frames, were found among the other pictures in the first box that was opened. She was evidently a very beautiful woman.

A painting of George Washington, presumably copied by Brumidi from the celebrated Gilbert Stuart painting, is in the collection, there is also one of Benjamin Franklin, after Benjamin West, beautifully embellished in a gold frame.

Many of the pictures are undoubtedly the original studies of paintings later placed in various parts of the Capitol.

There is a small oval-shaped pic-

ARTIST Who Decorated the Capitol Died, Leaving Valued Paintings to His Son, But Boxes Containing Them Had Never Been Located Until Recently—Stored in a Bank Vault, But Kept in the Best Possible Condition—Originals of the Capitol Decorations, Portraits, Early Work of Famous Artist, Brought to Light During the Past Week—The Unfinished Frieze.



PRESENT AT OPENING OF THE BRUMIDI BOXES OF PAINTINGS. LEFT TO RIGHT: J. M. BOTELER OF THE NATIONAL SAVINGS AND TRUST COMPANY, JOHN C. FITZPATRICK OF THE MANUSCRIPT DIVISION OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, DR. WILLIAM HENRY HOLMES, NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, EDWARD P. SCHWARTZ, EXECUTOR OF THE BRUMIDI WILL, CHARLES E. FAIRMAN, CUSTODIAN OF THE WORKS OF ART OF THE CAPITOL, AND J. G. LANGDON, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT AND CITY PLANNER, IN CHARGE OF DEVELOPMENT OF WASHINGTON'S PARKS.

ture of a mountain scene. In general style and coloring it is decidedly similar to the panels on the first floor of the Capitol. This would indicate that Brumidi was the man who painted these panels. It has heretofore, according to Mr. Fairman, not been known that Brumidi painted any panels on that floor.

Some of the other pictures may be described as follows: "St. Patrick," "Child and Grapes," "The Reaper," "Adoration of the Wise Men," "Women and Child," "The Five Senses," "Charlot," "Cupid Asleep" and "Madonna."

The only bank officer who was in service when the boxes were put in storage in 1879 was C. E. Nyman, Mr. Boteler says Mr. Nyman treated the boxes tenderly during the twenty-nine years he had charge of them, and often expressed the hope that some one would turn up some day and claim them so that he could learn just what it was he had been custodian of for so many years.

No definite plans for the disposition of the pictures has been determined upon by Mr. Schwartz. He, however, is considering the advisability of placing them on exhibition for a month or two in some prominent educational institution, so that the people of Washington may be afforded an opportunity to see them.

Half a century ago Brumidi's painting at the top of the rotunda, a copy, perhaps the original, which was found in the boxes, was described in these beautiful words by S. D. Wyeth:

"To an American the rotunda of the Capitol is replete with interest. He feels his heart beat within him as he treads the solid floor. Pictures and works in alto relieve crowd on the sight, and from them all come glimpses of proud historic teachings.

"Up, still higher, above the painted iron caissons, which, like huge plates of overlying mail, approach the far-away roof, 180 feet distant, the fresco by Brumidi arrests the gaze, as though the sky had opened and it were permitted to look into the 'Beyond.'

"Clouds of gold, azure and rose seem hanging there, spanned by a rainbow, and, floating among them, forms of exquisite beauty. Grand mythological figures, symbolizing Force and Progress, appear there, too, titanic—majestic, almost appalling with their great significance. The calm glorious faces of the great American dead also look down, with eyes that seem living eyes, from out the mysterious dizzy height of the huge concave.

"Washington, the savior of his country, apotheosized, appears seated in majesty. On his right is the Goddess of Liberty, and on his left is a winged idealization of Victory and

Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

"Below this center group are six others surrounding the base of the canopy. The first, occupying the west, is War, Freedom, terrible in vengeance, with upraised sword, is striking down Tyranny and Kingly Power. They are overcome, and fleeing from her wrath in dismay; with them is Anger, and also Revenge and Discord bearing the incendiary torch. An angry Eagle, striking with his beak, is fighting for, and by the side of Freedom.

"The second is Agriculture. This conception, in all its details, is softly beautiful, as the other is sublime in its exhibition of destructive power. Ceres, the goddess of harvests and the fields, with the horn of plenty, is in the center. Young America, with liberty cap of red, the bonnet rouge of France, having under his control a pair of vigorous horses hitched to an American reaper, in conscious pride is exhibiting his skill. The background is a luxuriant mass of prolific American vegetation. Flora is gathering flowers, and lingering near is a child. Beyond is Pomona, with a basket of fruit.

"Then succeeds Mechanic.

"Vulcan, the old stalwart Tubal Cain of Grecian mythology, is the colossal genius of this group. His right foot rests on a cannon. Machinery, forges, mortars and cannon balls strewn around remind us of forging thunderbolts, as well as of combat with, and

is one of the most noted works of art of that country. It was while in Mexico that he made the sketches of the great Mexican sun dial and the figures of the idols which now appear in the frieze in the Capitol rotunda.

The coming to Washington in 1854 proved to be the great event in the life of Brumidi. He was so delighted with Washington and the art possibilities of the Capitol that he never thereafter left the city, remaining until his death, which occurred thirty-six years later.

The first public announcement made by him was to the effect that he was going to become a citizen of the United States as quickly as the law would permit him to do so. It was always one of his chief delights to refer to himself and sign his name as a citizen of this country.

Gen. Meigs, who had charge of the public buildings when Brumidi first appeared upon the scene, promptly turned down his request for an opportunity to do some fresco work. Persistent applications, however, finally won the general over, and the Italian artist entered the American Capitol for the remainder of his life. His first work was the decorations of the agricultural room, the central figure of the design being "Cincinnatus Driving the Plow." Later he decorated the President's room, the Senate reception room, the canopy of the dome and the Senate post office room. He painted the portraits of Justice Story and Chancellors Kent and Livingston.

The artist worked in a spirit of decoration which was a sort of compromise between history and mythology. His designs are allegorical and historical. He diligently endeavored, so far as possible, to make his work American.

The scaffolding built for him to paint the picture in the dome was raised from the floor, and he lay on his back as he painted. The perfect perspective which he preserved working in this position is considered by all art critics as wonderful. These frescoes were ordered in 1844. They have been criticized at times in regard to their coloring, but it must be remembered that only nine colors could be used upon the

the sand, De Soto, Pocahontas, the landing of the Pilgrims and William Penn. It is here that his work stopped. The cartoons as prepared by Brumidi for the completion of the frieze were "Oglethorpe and the Indians," "The Battle of Lexington," "Surrender of Cornwallis," "Decatur at Tripoli," "The Death of Tecumseh," "The Entrance of Scott into the City of Mexico" and "The Discovery of Gold."

It is barely possible that as a result of the recent world war, with the development of the airplane, tanks and submarines, Congress may modernize Brumidi's old plans and at last have the frieze completed in such manner as to show some historical details of the greatest war of all ages.

Brumidi's work in the Capitol was done in genuine fresco. Painting in fresco is done with earthy or mineral colors mixed or ground in water, which are applied to the surface of plaster or stucco while it is still sufficiently fresh or wet to imbibe or incorporate them with itself. The painting is, in fact, a mosaic in colored plaster. It is comparatively indestructible and will retain its original color and brilliancy unchanged and undiminished for centuries—in fact, as long as the wall on which it is painted may remain intact. In the process of painting only a rough surface of plaster is prepared at once as can be completely finished while it is still wet. Thus the picture has to progress piecemeal; each little section must be completed so as to harmonize with the rest of the composition, and there is no possibility of retouching it after it is dry.

Before the actual process of painting on the walls begins careful and elaborate studies of color and full-sized cartoons or outline drawings are prepared. From the cartoons the outlines are transferred directly to the plaster by dusting through perforations made along the lines of the drawings, and, judged by the color studies, the small section in hand is completed. When it is considered that when the colors, when applied to the wet plaster, are much darker than they will finally appear when dry, it will be seen what great difficulties are encountered by the artist. Mr. Brumidi,



BRUMIDI'S PAINTING OF HIS AMERICAN WIFE. HER LIKENESS IS NOTICED IN MANY OF HIS CAPITOL DECORATIONS. ORIGINAL PAINTING INCLUDED AMONG THOSE LOST FOR FORTY YEARS.

and trappings for the frieze of the Capitol of the United States and for other purposes; my gold watch and chain, bookcase, library and all objects and things in my room; all money that I have in possession, or that may be due me at the time of my demise from the United States government or any other source. These things and any or all property real and personal, and chose in action, that I may now have or may hereafter possess, do I convey to said Lawrence S. Brumidi, to be enjoyed by him, his heirs, or assigns, forever, free from all claim or claims of any, every and all persons, whomsoever, claiming or to claim the same or any part thereof, by, under or through me or any of my heirs.

I appoint Robert Mason of Washington, D. C., my Executor, who shall receive no reward.

Washington, D. C., June 27, 1879.

(Signed) CONSTANTINO BRUMIDI, (Seal)

The said Constantino Brumidi, of 921 G Street, Washington, D. C., on said 27th of June, 1879, signed and sealed this instrument and published and declared the same to be his last will; and we, at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other, have hereunto written our names as subscribing witnesses.

WILLIAM H. APPLETON,
A. H. WHITAKER,
MARTHA DENT,
ROBERT MASON.

Upon the death of Brumidi's widow, some years later, Edward P. Schwartz of this city was named as executor of the will made in 1879. He was subsequently named committee man by the court for Lawrence, the son;

Banker Boteler's eyes bulged, and, waving his hands in the air, he said: "Thank goodness, the mystery is going to be solved at last, and we will find out what our earth is in those two big boxes that have been in our vaults for the last thirty years, and which have accumulated storage charges of almost \$300."

Securing an order from the court to open the boxes, Mr. Schwartz invited Dr. William Henry Holmes, the well known artist, who is the head of the National Gallery of Art; J. G. Langdon, landscape architect, and city planner, in charge of the development of Washington's park system; Charles E. Fairman, custodian of the works of art at the Capitol; J. M. Boteler of the National Savings and Trust Company, John C. Fitzpatrick of the manuscript division of the Library of Congress, and the writer, to witness the opening of the mysterious and long mislaid boxes peeping in the deepest vaults far below the street.

The boxes were so securely fastened together with screws and nails that it required the entire colored janitorial force of the bank half an hour to get them open. The packing was evidently done by Brumidi himself, because they were arranged so expertly as to sustain no damage whatever. By far the most interesting

fringe of gold, to which he is directing the attention of Robert Morris, the financier of the American revolution. It was he who guided to a successful issue the entangled pecuniary embarrassments of our country in its struggle for independence. Alas, for himself, he died a bankrupt and in confinement for debt. Boxes of merchandise and bales of goods, with men at work among them, are to be seen. Two sailors point to a gunboat in the distance.

"The group beside this symbolizes the Marine.

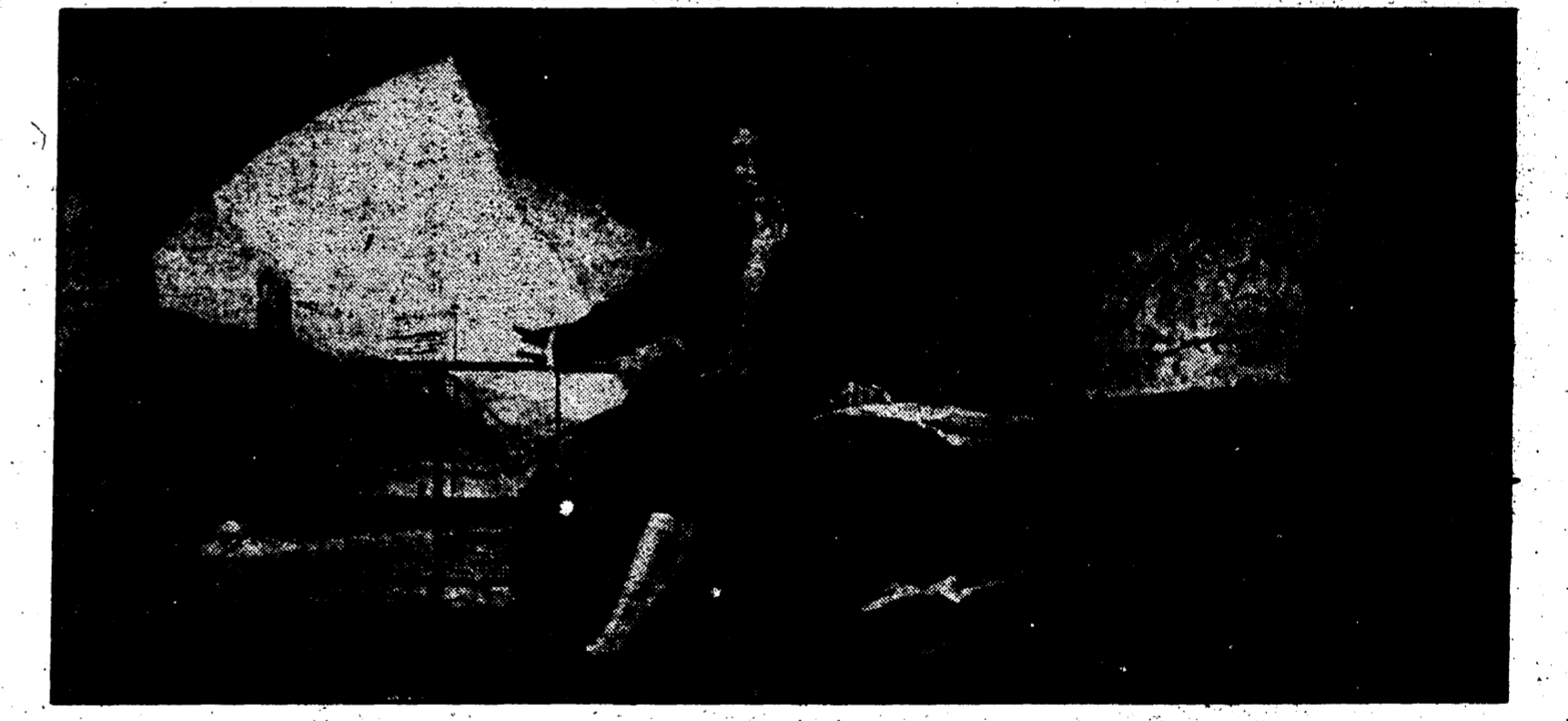
"Neptune, in marine state, bearing his trident, in his car, accompanied by his chariot and attendants, is emerging astonished from the deep. The beautiful Aphrodite (Venus) born of the sea foam, half risen from the waves, holds in her hands the Atlantic cable, given her by a winged cherub, and is about dropping it into the sea.

"The last is the Arts and Sciences.

"Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, stands gloriously prominent, with helmet and spear, as she surveys the



"TELEGRAPH," IN SENATE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COMMITTEE ROOM, INCLUDED AMONG THE PAINTINGS.



"ROBERT FULTON," AT PRIVATE ENTRANCE OF SENATE CENSUS COMMITTEE ROOM OF THE CAPITOL. ONE OF BRUMIDI PAINTINGS, FOUND IN RECENTLY DISCOVERED BOXES.

victory over, the giant forces of nature and making them subservient to human will and purposes.

"The next, and occupying the east, is Commerce.

"Mercury, the protector of travelers and merchants, holds in his hand a bag of gold, to which he is directing the attention of Robert Morris, the financier of the American revolution. It was he who guided to a successful issue the entangled pecuniary embarrassments of our country in its struggle for independence. Alas, for himself, he died a bankrupt and in confinement for debt. Boxes of merchandise and bales of goods, with men at work among them, are to be seen. Two sailors point to a gunboat in the distance.

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