

## Interesting Canvases Preserved

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## INTERESTING CANVASES PRESERVED.

When the first decorative effort was made in our present Capitol many details received favorable comment from the Iowa public. Not the least to be commended were the frescos of the House and Senate chambers. These gave way to the more elaborate scheme recently brought to such satisfactory completion by the Capitol Improvement Commission. The House ceiling bore allegorical paintings representing Industry, Law, Agriculture, Peace, History and Commerce. The Senate decorations were portraits of Washington and Lincoln; Governors Lucas and Grimes; Justices Caleb Baldwin and Charles Mason; Speakers Rush Clark and John P. Carlton and Generals M. M. Crocker and Samuel R. Curtis. These frescos do not seem to have been canvases and so are lost to all but memory. But at the time of the recent decoration there was discarded a bit of art once featured as the most exquisite of Iowa mural decorations. These were the frescos of the Iowa Supreme Court room. They were painted on canvas and had not been removed when the fire occurred in January, 1904, at which time they were somewhat injured. They were removed under the direction of the Custodian and preserved in the vaults of the Clerk of the Supreme Court. When the decoration of the Historical building was under consideration, the Curator asked that these canvases be made a detail of the reading room walls, which has been done. As a result of their use the beautiful well-lighted room, with massive carved details of natural oak, presents one of the finest interiors of any within the state buildings at Des Moines. There is much satisfaction in having these canvases again accessible to the public under conditions quite as favorable as those for which they were originally painted. Regardless of their art value they are endeared to the Iowa public by reason of their service for a generation in the splendid Supreme Court room. They are also a memento of the taste of the men who erected the Capitol.

They were painted by Fritz Melzer, of Berlin, Germany, procured by General Ed Wright, brought to this

country and placed on the ceiling of the Supreme Court room as the final decorative feature. General Wright described them as consisting of six small subjects and four large allegorical canvases some ten by fourteen feet in size, all of the type of Greek mythology. The four large ones being as follows:

Ceres, the Goddess of Agriculture.

Justice on her throne. To her left stands Columbia, ever ready to sustain her decisions by word or deed. The figure to the right of Justice rejoices that the decision is in her favor. The sitting figure on the right denotes sorrow as the decision is rendered against her, but is content when she finds by examining the law that the decision is according to law. To the left a mother is explaining to her son the laws.

Columbia reigning on her throne. Above the globe in unity with the Goddess of Justice, the patrons of the States come to pay them their homage, bringing with them little children, which represent the territories. Iowa, who is a special favorite in Columbia's household, is seen sitting on the steps of the throne with a club and coat of arms, ever ready to defend her friend (Columbia) in case of need. In front of the throne is chiseled in everlasting rock the memorable date 1776, the foundation of the Republic. The American Eagle is proudly soaring over all, holding in his beak the historical emblem "E. Pluribus Unum."

Justice and Peace represented as ruling over the land bringing prosperity and plenty, culture and happiness, while rebellion is restrained and smitten down by Justice's strong right arm.

The canvases were remounted by Mr. T. I. Stoner, who decorated the building, and were restored by Charles Atherton Cumming, the Des Moines artist.

E. R. H.

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#### MR. GUE'S HISTORY OF IOWA.

I have been surprised and annoyed to learn that in some very intelligent quarters in this State, I have been accredited with some sort of responsibility for the *History of Iowa* written and published by the late Hon. Benjamin F. Gue. This is

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