

HUNTINGTON HALL

Showing Frieze on North and West Walls

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## HUNTINGTON HALL FRIEZE

The proposed restoration of the Huntington Hall Frieze, which was painted out in 1898, makes it desirable to recall its interesting history, so intimately connected with the early days of the Institute. (See Note A.)

In 1870 Professor William R. Ware, of the architectural department, in consultation with President Rogers and other members of the Corporation, appointed Mr. Paul Nefflen to make the sketches and carry out the work of completing Huntington Hall, in the Rogers Building, which had remained five years unfinished on account of lack of funds, by painting upon its walls a mural decoration to represent the subjects taught in the school and the Industrial Arts.

Mr. Nefflen was born in Würtemberg, was educated in the art schools at Stuttgart, and came to America in 1851. He had executed admirable decorations in Boston and in Syracuse, N.Y. (See Note B.)

The walls of the hall are divided by an architectural treatment of pilasters, architrave and cornice, and in the panels of the wide frieze above this architrave, on a level with the oval windows, were painted these groups. The color scheme was monochromatic, the figures, in yellow, being rather vigorously outlined in red against a yellowish-brown background, very light in tone.

A "trial panel," Physics and Astronomy, was first submitted, in the form of a small sketch, for approval (see Folder Nos. 20 and 21); but the first to appear on the wall was the group in the central panel behind the platform, which afterward became the seal of the Institute. (See Note C.) Next to this were small allegorical figures,

and beyond, on the right, Chemistry and Mining; on the left, Engineering and Architecture. The figures were about four feet in height. The panel Chemistry (No. 1) showed the interior of a laboratory and the manufacture of sulphuric acid. Mining (Nos. 2 and 3) depicts the interior of a coal mine. No reproductions are given of Engineering, which was represented by "a long steel tubular bridge," or of Architecture, a panel showing "a half-completed stone stairway, with the rough, untrimmed edges of the foundation still exposed to view," these being the panels to the left of the platform over the easterly entrance.

For filling in the remaining panels and paying the expenses of the decoration, outside assistance was sought. Different manufacturers in Massachusetts (see Note D) contributed a hundred dollars apiece to have their processes permanently displayed on the walls of this prominent technical institution; and Mr. Nefflen, with his sketch-book, visited the paper-mills of Holyoke, the wire-cloth mills at Clinton,—where he sketched the "Bigelow wire loom,"—and brick-yards, iron foundries, potteries, and textile manufactories near Boston. His sketches, though often crude, caught much of the spirit and action of the operatives in the different trades, and expressed, in a simple and decorative way, these methods of work, many of which are now obsolete. His method was preferable for mural painting to much of the brilliantly colored easel-picture work now called by that name. It is quite astonishing to see how he has simplified and flattened out a complicated cotton-printing machine (No. 10), so that it is not at all unsuitable for wall decoration.

A carpenter (No. 4), in characteristic pose, is laying his try-square on the edge of a board along which he is sighting. The students of Mechanical Drawing (No. 6) are in dress as archaic as the locomotive they have designed. In Freehand Drawing (No. 7) one can picture a corner of the Architectural Department or of the Art Museum, among the antique casts. The Rope-walk (No. 8) is a reminiscence of the days of "old salts" and "spinning yarns." This sketch was made in Charlestown. The panel, Casting Iron (No. 9), is a masterpiece, well composed and vigorously

drawn. It is thoroughly American, appropriate to its setting, purpose, and subject. How strange it is that, while we encourage American subjects in fiction, we discourage them in art! Textile Printing (No. 10) shows a faithful drawing of a once familiar machine; and Weaving (No. 11), which is a part of the same panel, recalls the equally forgotten New England mill girls. There were panel decorations over the three windows in the rear of the hall, emblematic of Navigation (No. 12), Electricity, and Telegraphy.

Another sketch (No. 21) was made of the subject Casting Iron; and a long panel (Nos. 20 and 21), in flat colors, representing Physics and Astronomy, was the "trial panel" referred to, required by Professor Ware for approval before the artist could begin his work. Of the executed panels some one has said, "One was a group of godlike youths, led by a bearded professor of preternatural dignity, peering through a telescope and calculating upon a globe."

Pottery (No. 5), Modelling (No. 19), Glass Painting (No. 18), Printing (No. 17), Rolling Wire (No. 16), Shipbuilding (No. 15), Glass-blowing (No. 14), Brick-making (No. 13), Wire-cloth Making, Carpet-making, Paper-making, Paper-ruling and Calendar, Spinning Yarn, Leather Preparation, Stone Cutting, Surveying, and Dyeing were other subjects for which sketches were made. The artist also made studies for Geologic Stratification and Fossils as mural decoration.

It must be remembered that the art of mural painting in America in 1871 was in its infancy. (See Note E.) The figures of "Anahita," the Persian goddess of Night, and of Columbus and the Daybreak, which had been developing in the mind of William M. Hunt since the "forties," were not completed on the walls of the New York State capitol at Albany until seven years later (1878). La Farge was just becoming known, and five years later began his work in Trinity Church, Boston. It would be interesting to know if these simple figures on the walls of the lecture-room where the members of Trinity Church congregation worshipped while their beautiful structure was rising, gave any impetus to the movement for mural painting which has increased so wonderfully in the thirty succeeding years.

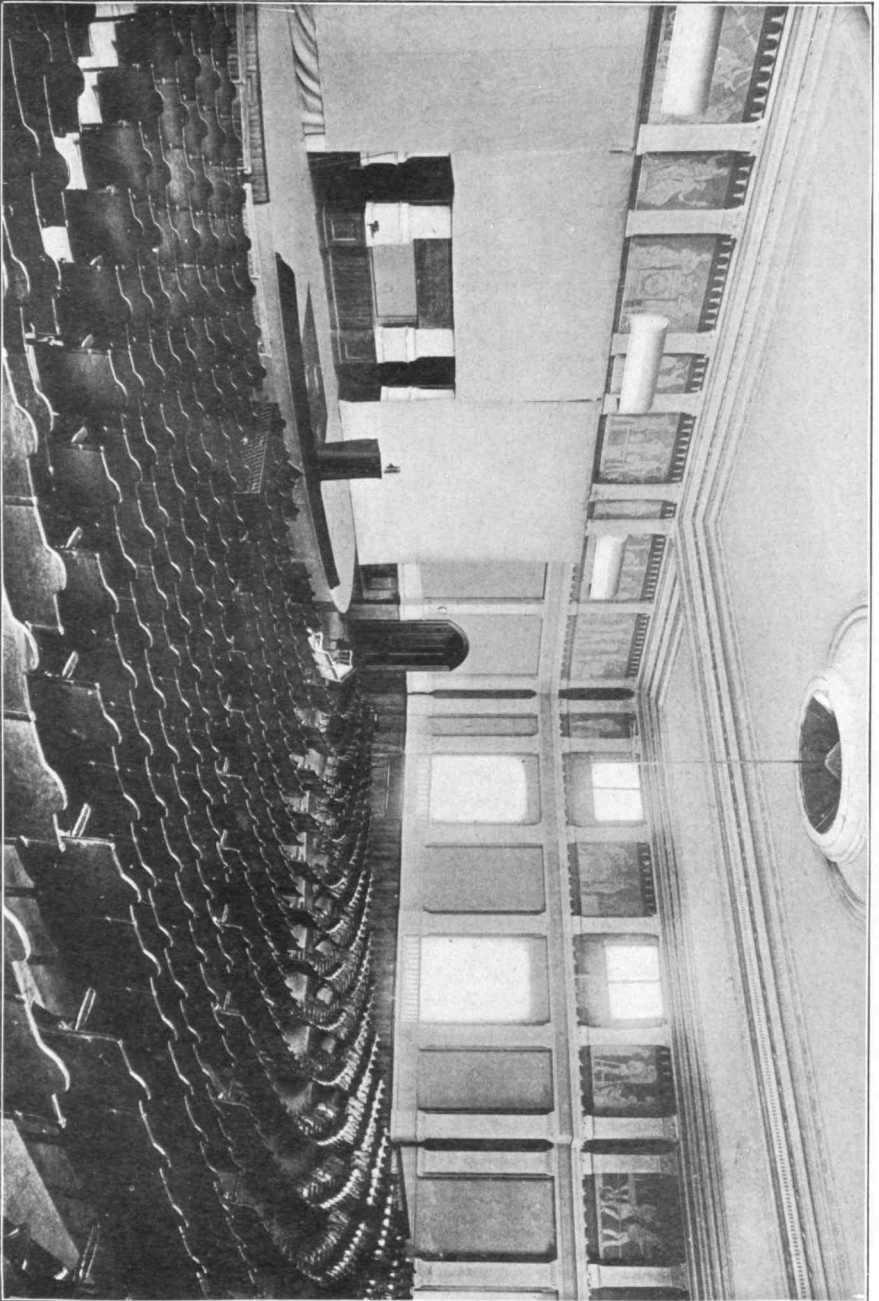
The paintings were pleasing to President Rogers, the founder

of the Institute; and it is well to recall them as a part of the earlier history of the institution which, from simple beginnings, has grown so strong. For many of the students and Faculty they are inseparably connected with Huntington Hall, and formed one of the bonds of sentiment—of which there have been too few at the “Tech”—that drew the affections of many alumni to their Alma Mater. Like stained-glass windows in a church, they often relieved the weight of weary words, and shortened many a long lecture.

The drawings were in water color, directly on the plaster, and were not permanently fixed, so that during the summer vacation of 1898, as they had become badly damaged, painters were requested to put the hall in presentable shape; and a few pails of water, with a scrubbing-brush, was the easiest and quickest solution of the problem. There is no doubt that the decorations were in bad condition, bad in color, very much soiled and defaced; but what a disagreeable surprise it was to returning students and alumni to find no longer the frieze for which so many had come to have a sincere affection!

It was then suggested that an attempt be made to restore the decoration; and Mr. William Gibbons Preston, the architect who planned the Rogers Building, and Dr. H. W. Tyler, the Secretary of the Institute, endeavored to find if any cartoons were in existence. After much correspondence it was found that Mr. Nefflen was dead, but that his widow was living, and that the original sketches were in her possession. At that time it was found impracticable to buy them; but in 1904, through the interest and efforts of three or four men who recalled the frieze, and believed that there was something in it which should not be forgotten, the necessary subscription was raised. By the generosity of twelve contributors, not all connected with the Tech, but all actuated by affection for the Institute or by a desire to promote a love of art in our city and among our technical students, the original sketches were bought, and are shown in the accompanying cuts.

It is hoped that these may form the inspiration and motive for a restored frieze that shall be worthy of the present standing and the ambitious hope of the Institute.



HUNTINGTON HALL FRIEZE

Painted 1871—Removed 1898

The spirit is there in the old frieze,—the spirit of simple, industrious, progressive, technical work. We can restore and complete the frieze much better than was before possible; but we would have to try a long time to find a better expression of a simple and appropriate decoration for a technical school than that expressed, for example, in the panel, Casting Iron (No. 9). Let us restore, then, the same old motive, honored in the history of the Institute, and develop it as it should be developed, with as little or as much money as we can command.

It has been suggested, and taken up already with considerable enthusiasm by the students, that each class restore one or more of the panels of the frieze, as a memorial of the class, on canvas, so that the frames could be removed in case of any change of location.

The central panel over the platform was the Technology Seal. It has been stated that the original suggestion, finally adopted as the seal, was the first sketch for this. It has appeared in many forms in Technology literature, and even, under a clever disguise, in the Technology Club book-plate. The replacing of this has been undertaken by the class of 1905, the approval of the President of the Institute having first been obtained. He, as we know, approves of everything that will increase the affection of the students for "Tech"; and in this case he has expressed himself in favor of "a new frieze that shall recall what was good in the old and at the same time be characteristic of the present."

One method proposed is to have the subject given as a sketch-problem in the Architectural Department. The Senior Class may depend upon the co-operation of the fifth-year men who complete their work in 1905. The Architectural Department will aid in carrying out a project of this kind, and the students may be sure that anything done on the frieze will be watched with interest by the alumni and many others outside the Institute. It might be that different panels would be contributed by persons interested in the subjects considered, or that aid would be given by such persons to the class putting up the panel.

If, further than this, it is found that money to employ a mural painter of note is available, the work may still be given under the

names of the different classes. It may even be advisable to erect temporary cartoons to be carried out in oils later.

The plan at present is as follows:—

(1) The Senior Class (including all courses) will put up one, three, or five panels, leaving a fund for this purpose, and unveiling either the cartoons or the completed work on Class Day.

(2) Sketches will be made by students of the Architectural Department, selected from the sixth, fifth, and fourth years, under the supervision of that department, with outside assistance when necessary.

(3) There will be a preliminary problem given out in the Architectural Department, to obtain studies for the general color scheme and treatment of the whole hall; and the color scheme will be worked out under the direction of the department.

One of the purposes of this article is to express the appreciation of many within and without the Institute for the value historically as an American work of art of this early mural frieze, and to say that the opportunity is still open, though the initiative has already been taken by the admirable action of the Senior Class, to restore this frieze, panel by panel. The co-operation of future graduating classes, of alumni, and of different professions, industrial workers, and manufacturers, is in order.

It has been somewhat difficult to find treatment of wall-surfaces similar to what is wanted at the "Tech." The decorations by Galland (see Note F) on the wall of the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, excepting that the subjects are French instead of American, are appropriate. The figures are in brown on a gold background. They were executed in 1891, twenty years after the "Tech" frieze was painted. E. H. Blashfield has painted a lunette, entitled "Iron," for a bank building in Pittsburg; but the subject is too much idealized, and treated in a manner different from what seems to be demanded at the Institute.

The Institute frieze was unique; and a restored decoration of that unique, simple, direct character of processes in current use at the time they are painted, but treated broadly, as appropriate for mural painting, is the "Tech Frieze" for which we are working.