

Foreword

Each year many of the millions of people who visit the United States Capitol are surprised and delighted to discover that the building is not only the home of the Congress but also a museum and gallery of fine art. Among the most remarkable works in the Capitol are the paintings of Constantino Brumidi, who devoted much of the last twenty-five years of his life to decorating the building. Indeed, his contributions to the Capitol are unsurpassed by those of any other artist. I am pleased to have had the privilege to direct the preparation of the first scholarly, in-depth publication on Brumidi as part of the celebration of the bicentennial of the Capitol.

The book is an outgrowth of the mural conservation program. It was apparent to me in my first years as Architect of the Capitol that much of the beauty of Brumidi's work was hidden under grime and overpaint, and that some murals were threatened by cracking plaster. In 1981, I engaged Bernard Rabin, a dean of American conservation who has also spent many years working on frescoes in Italy, to conduct a survey of all the mural paintings in the Capitol. His report described the conditions of the various works and recommended priorities for treatment; it has since served as the foundation for the mural conservation program that I began in 1984 with the support of special appropriations from the Congress. I enjoyed my personal involvement in these projects and making final decisions when a judgment call was needed.

One of the most thrilling and gratifying projects of my tenure as Architect was the conservation of the canopy in the Rotunda, whose progress I followed closely in 1987 and 1988. While examining the conservator's progress from the scaffold, almost 200 feet above the Rotunda floor, I gained first-hand experience of the conditions under which Brumidi worked and, thus, new appreciation for the magnitude of his achievement.

The Brumidi Corridors on the first floor of the Senate wing are being conserved as part of an ongoing incremental program, beginning in 1985 with the frescoed lunettes that were in the worst condition. Now, all of Brumidi's original compositions can be seen, and a long-range program to restore the decorative painting that surrounds them has been launched.

For their work in uncovering Brumidi's paintings, I would like to thank Bernard Rabin, Constance Silver, Larry Keck, Perry Hurt, Christiana Cunningham-Adams, and Catherine Myers. I would also like to recognize Elliott Carroll, formerly my Executive Assistant, who brought his knowledge of and experience with conservation to directing the first years of the mural conservation program. For envisioning, organizing, researching, and writing this book, my thanks go to Dr. Barbara A. Wolanin, Curator for the Architect of the Capitol, who has effectively and sensitively managed the conservation program since 1985. Museum Specialist Pamela Violante McConnell has played an important supporting role under three curators. Thanks are due also to our agency photographers, Wayne Firth and Stephen Payne, for their documentation of the art before and after conservation for our permanent records. Most importantly, necessary and practical support for the preparation of the book was provided by the Congress with the allocation of funds appropriated for the celebration of the bicentennial of the Capitol.

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Architect of the Capitol, 1971–1995