
Thomas Crawford

(1813/1814–1857)

Thomas Crawford is remembered by the U.S. Senate not for any political accomplishments, but for his central role as the sculptor of neoclassical figural groups for the U.S. Capitol. Crawford's massive *Progress of Civilization* fills the pediment above the east front of the Senate wing, while a marble copy (the badly deteriorated original was removed in 1974) of his *Justice and History* (p. 232) surmounts the Senate doors of the east portico. He also designed the bronze relief doors at the east portico entrances to both the Senate and House wings. Finally, Crawford created the giant *Statue of Freedom* that tops the Capitol's central dome.

Little is known of Crawford's earliest years, but he is thought to have been born in New York City. He studied drawing and was apprenticed to a wood carver before joining the noted New York stonecutting firm of John Frazee (p. 204) and Robert Launitz. The latter encouraged Crawford to study in Rome, and the young sculptor traveled there in 1835, the first of many American artists to do so. In Italy Crawford studied with the preeminent Danish neoclassic sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. Crawford established a reputation in 1843 with the statue *Orpheus and Cerberus*, now at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts was an early friend and helped the sculptor obtain commissions throughout his career.

As Crawford's reputation grew, commissions followed—so many that for a time his busy studio consisted of 12 rooms and 50 assistants. Crawford won several competitions, including one for a massive equestrian statue of George Washington for the grounds of the statehouse in Richmond, Virginia. Tragically, Crawford did not live to see its completion, nor the installation of all his U.S. Capitol work. At the height of his productivity (he had created more than 60 statues), Crawford died of a brain tumor. He was only 44 years old.

This marble bust of sculptor Thomas Crawford by Tommaso Gagliardi was purchased for the Capitol in 1871 for \$100. The Joint Committee on the Library bought the work from Hannah Denmead, whose family owned a stonecutting studio in Washington, D.C., at Maryland Avenue and Second Street, N.E. The Denmeads apparently acquired the bust when Gagliardi departed the city for Italy in the late 1850s.

Born in Rome, Gagliardi was apprenticed to the sculptor Pietro Tenerani (a pupil of Antonio Canova) and was briefly employed by Thomas Crawford in Italy. Gagliardi immigrated to the United States for political reasons, arriving in 1855. Work was just beginning on the extension to the U.S. Capitol, and Gagliardi found employment for three years carving statuary designed by Crawford for the Senate wing. This is certainly the period when Crawford's bust was created, possibly following the master sculptor's untimely death in 1857.

Some of Gagliardi's contemporaries disputed his ability as a carver, although the bust of Crawford would seem to discount these detractors. Ironically, Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, superintendent of the Capitol extension, recalled in his journal that Crawford himself had written to him about Gagliardi. According to Meigs, Crawford called Gagliardi "nothing but a rougher-out" and "no more fit to finish a statue than he is to be President of the United States."¹ However, Lot Flannery, an American sculptor who worked with Gagliardi at the Capitol, described him in a 1910 letter as "a tiger in marble cutting."

Gagliardi returned to Europe shortly after his time at the Capitol. He later founded a school of sculpture in Tokyo, where his discovery of an important quarry earned him the Japanese government's gratitude. Gagliardi maintained a close friendship with the Piccirilli brothers, successful New York carvers, and through them secured a number of important commissions worldwide. He traveled extensively in Asia, was remembered as a "brilliant conversationalist," and ended his days at ease in a Tuscan villa.²

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Tommaso Gagliardi (1820–1895)

Marble, ca. 1855–1858

27 x 22 x 13½ inches (68.6 x 55.9 x 33.3 cm)

Signed (on back of subject's right shoulder): T. GAGLIARDI. FECIT

Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1871

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