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The Murals of the Dewey Graduate Library

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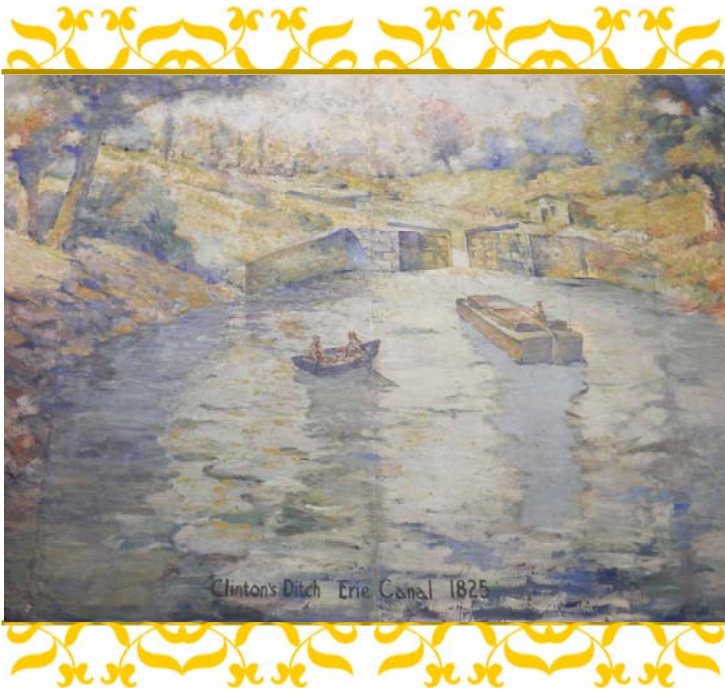
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The Murals of the Dewey Graduate Library



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All of the murals in the Dewey Graduate Library were designed by William Brantley Van Ingen (1858-1955), a student of John LaFarge and Louis Comfort Tiffany, as part of a grant provided by the WPA (Works Progress Administration), a New Deal agency, from 1937-1938. Van Ingen previously created murals for the Panama Canal Administration Building, the United States Mint in Philadelphia, and the Library of Congress's Thomas Jefferson building in Washington, D.C.

The medium Van Ingen used for the Dewey murals was oil, pre-primed on canvas at his New York City studio. Van Ingen sketched his ideas on 17' x 4' canvas panels, but most of the brushwork was done by his assistant, John E. Jackson. The canvas panels were then rolled up and brought to Albany, where they were attached to the plaster walls with white lead putty. The 23 panels make up 4,500 square feet of murals in the Dewey Graduate Library.

On his inspiration for the murals, Van Ingen recalled his plans in a letter to the librarian, Mary Cobb, dated September 22, 1948: "My constant thought in all this work was to make something students would be interested in and like. My first impression on seeing the library was to call for a verdure tapestry. Bearing in mind then that verdure tapestries were in the main composed entirely of trees, I made my painting with the trees as the prominent characteristic and the subject matter necessarily in the background." Van Ingen also noted that he used an example of a verdure tapestry from the Haverhill House in Massachusetts.

Van Ingen collaborated with Adam Brubacher, the President of the New York State College for Teachers, on the choice of themes for the murals. Brubacher frequently traveled to New York to monitor Van Ingen's progress and there were occasional creative differences.

Right: A close-up of the *Campus* panel.



Mural Details

Half Moon: This mural is located on the North wall, behind the circulation desk. It depicts the Half Moon, Henry Hudson's ship, at its landing in Albany in 1609. The inscription for this panel reads: "The finest land for cultivation that I ever set foot upon — Hendrick [sic] Hudson, Log of the Half Moon, 1609."

Van Rensselaer: Located beside the left arch on the balcony, this mural depicts a stage coach in front of the Van Rensselaer Manor House. Not to be confused with the later and more elaborate Manor house, this earlier version stood until 1839.

Beverwyck: This mural is one of the least visible in the library as it is located on the balcony behind cubicles. This left half of the mural, described as "Albany, 1700," is meant to hint at Albany's past flourishing beaver trade.

State Street: The right half of the large mural located on the balcony is based on a picture of State Street in 1805 by James Eights, reprinted by Benjamin Lossing in the February 1857 issue of *Harper's Monthly*. It is important to note the original photo may not have been accurate as it featured palm trees.



Left: A close-up of the *Half Moon* mural.

RESTORATION

The Van Ingen murals were first restored in 1974 by students of the Cooperstown Graduate Program in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. At that time, the murals suffered from water damage, causing panels to peel away from the walls.

Due to the lack of an HVAC system prior to 1993, the murals were drastically affected by large daily fluctuations in temperature during the warmer months. The *Convention* mural suffered the worst damage and thus, in 1996, it was restored by the Williamstown Art Conservation Center.

Inquiries into further repair quotes began in 2007 for the *Beverwyck* and *State Street* sections on the balcony. Again, the work was completed by the Williamstown Art Conservation Center and took place in 2008.

All restoration work was paid for by the Preservation of the Hawley Windows and Murals Fund.

Right: A portion at the top of the *Jogues* mural had to be repaired due to tearing. In 1974.



Kingston: Located beside the right arch on the balcony, this mural is meant to depict the Senate House in Kingston. Van Ingen justified its inclusion by saying it would “represent a form of government which replaced the feudal system typified by the manor house,” as it is located opposite the *Van Rensselaer* mural. It is also important to note that Kingston was the first capital of New York State. Albany would not become the state capitol for another 20 years, in 1797.

Clinton’s Ditch (pictured on cover): Located on the right of the North Wall is the mural inscribed “‘Clinton’s Ditch’ Erie Canal 1825.” Van Ingen only found modern images of the canal, and thus this mural was mostly inspired by boyhood memories.



Railroad: On the east wall is a depiction of the “First Steam Passenger Railroad in the United States 1831.” If you look closely, you can see the yellow passenger cars, which indicate that this represents the Dewitt-Clinton, named in honor of the governor of New York State who was responsible for the construction of the Erie Canal.

Visscher: This panel, inscribed “Widow Visscher and the Indians,” comes from an account Van Ingen found “of the Indians coming to widow Visscher’s house and the widow chasing them out.” Widow Visscher is likely Lydia Fryer Visscher, second wife and widow of Matthew Visscher of Pearl Street. Visscher practiced law and was a lieutenant in the city militia regiment.

NYSCT: This panel illustrates the “First Building for the New York State College for Teachers 1844,” though Van Ingen noted that it was “the second building the college occupied.”

Fort Crailo: Inscribed “Fort Crailo where Yankee Doodle was written 1776,” this panel is fairly self descriptive, however, it is important to note that the composition of “Yankee Doodle” is much debated. The mural is meant to depict fife and drum corps playing the tune.

Schuyler: On the south wall, this panel displays “General Schuyler Receiving General Burgoyne 1777.” This is meant to depict Schuyler receiving Burgoyne at the Schuyler Mansion after Burgoyne’s surrender during the Battle of Saratoga.

Convention: This panel is meant to depict two events, hence the two inscriptions “The Albany Convention of 1754” and “The Albany Plan of the Union Proposed by Benjamin Franklin.” Franklin can be seen conversing on a bench in this mural.

Right: Schuyler receiving Burgoyne.



Capitol: This panel is meant to depict the State Capitol, though it is difficult to tell that it is a separate mural as it contains part of the second inscription from the *Convention* mural. Van Ingen used an image captioned “Capitol of the State” from Joel Munsell’s *Annals of Albany* as a reference, though it is not an exact match as he appears to have placed a cross on the top of the building when the original showed Lady Justice atop a small dome.



Above: A close-up of the *Jogues* panel.

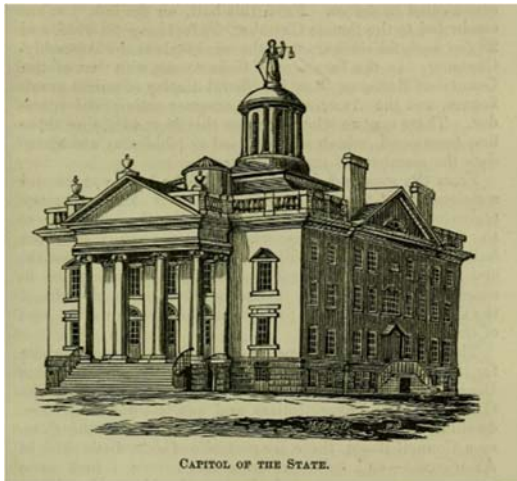
Council: This panel is meant to be paired with the *Convention* panel as Van Ingen wrote, “the Indians held their own council in regard to the plan [of the Union]. The date for the Indian conclave was courteously furnished me by the Indian Museum in New York.”

Jogues: With an inscription reading “Father Jogues Preaching to the Indians,” this panel depicts the Jesuit missionary preaching to the Mohawk Indians. Jogues was taken prisoner by the Mohawks but later escaped to Fort Orange.

Fort Orange: This panel depicts the previously mentioned “Fort Orange 1650,” which was the first permanent Dutch Settlement.



Above is a close-up of the building meant to represent the Capitol of the State. However, it is difficult to see any similarity between Van Ingen's reference illustration located below. It is possible Van Ingen is showing a side view, but the main roof structures do not appear to match.



Vanderheyden: The reference for this panel was also likely an illustration from Munsell's *Annals*. The panel's inscription reads "Vander heyden Palace used as First School in Albany for Higher Education." The Palace is believed to have been built in 1725 by Johannes J. Beekman and purchased by Jacob Vanderheyden, one of the first directors of the Bank of Albany.

Bank: This panel depicts the "New York State National Bank 1803." In his letters, Van Ingen noted that the architect of the building was Philip Hooker. Again, Van Ingen likely used an illustration from Munsell's *Annals* as reference.

Campus: This panel is meant as the first half of a mural depicting the University at Albany campus, the second half is the *Hawley* panel. The inscription reads "'But the changes have been slow and reluctant, extorted from the aristocracy of the schools, like civil liberty from tyrants by the irresistible [sic] democracy of common sense.' Gideon Hawley 1812." Van Ingen wished to depict students of various classes from the history of the school, which is visible in the variety of dress styles.

Hawley: The second half of the mural depicting the University's campus, this scene shows Gideon Hawley talking to a young man while in academic dress with Horace Mann, William J. Milne, and Andrew Sloane Draper.

Right: A close-up of the *Hawley* mural.

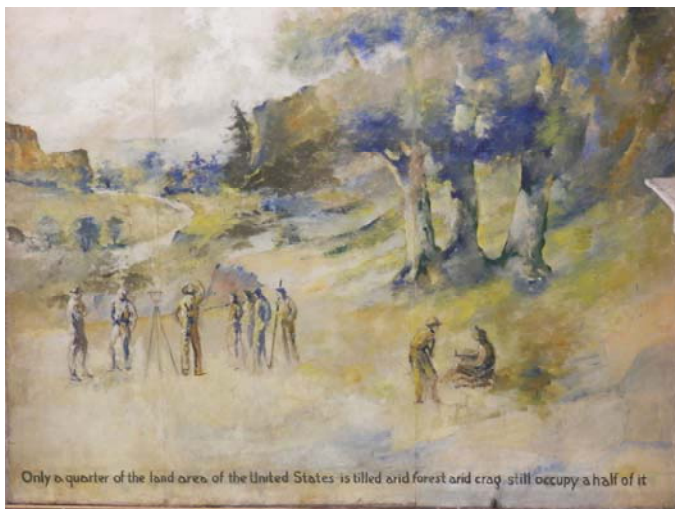


Corps: This panel depicts the “Student Army Training Corps 1917.” Van Ingen wrote that this was “the time when State College was used as a training camp for soldiers in the First World War.”

Resources: This panel is merely described as “The conservation of both human and natural resources of the country.”

Land: Van Ingen described his original idea for this panel as “on the west wall, I proposed showing the first long distance airplane from Albany to New York. But Dr. Brubacher suggested that one of the C.C.C. (Civilian Conservation Corps) camps be shown. I tried to place the map in landscape conditions which would harmonize with the general effect of which I aimed.” The panel’s inscription reads “Only a quarter of the land area of the United States is tilled and forest and crag still occupy a half of it.”

Below: A close-up of the
Land mural.



DONATIONS

If you would like to support the conservation of the Hawley murals, donations can be made out to the *Hawley Windows & Murals Endowment* (40-46166).

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