

Introduction

Welcome to the Brumidi Corridors of the United States Capitol. These corridors are some of the most artistically ornate and creatively decorated hallways in the nation. This brochure will provide you with information about the artist and his work, and guide you through these famous Senate hallways. We hope you enjoy your visit.

What Are The Brumidi Corridors?

The Brumidi Corridors are the richly painted hallways on the first floor of the Senate wing in the Capitol Building. The decorative wall paintings were designed by Italian artist Constantino Brumidi, and executed by him and painters of many nationalities. Brumidi left his native country and immigrated to America due to political upheavals in Rome. He arrived in New York City in 1852 and became a United States citizen five years later.

By 1850, the Capitol needed additional room to accommodate the growing country, and extensions were designed to provide office space and new House and Senate chambers. In 1855, Captain Montgomery Meigs, Engineer of the Capitol



Constantino Brumidi (1805–1880)

Extensions, hired Brumidi to begin work in the Capitol; in 1856 the classically trained artist began creating designs for the Senate corridors, based on a loggia by Raphael in the Vatican. Meigs envisioned a similar decorative plan for the Capitol, with the walls displaying classical images and symbolic representations of American culture.

Some areas within the Brumidi Corridors were left incomplete, due to insufficient time or funds. Several of these empty spaces were later filled with historic scenes painted by 20th century artists.

Constantino Brumidi worked in the Capitol for over 25 years, using his talents as a fresco artist to decorate the Senate corridors and numerous other areas throughout the building. His allegorical painting entitled *The Apotheosis of George Washington* is located in the eye of the Rotunda dome. Brumidi died on February 19, 1880, four months after slipping and nearly falling from a scaffold while working on the Rotunda frieze.

Brumidi has been called “the Michelangelo of the Capitol” by historians. Proud of his accomplishments, the artist is reported to have remarked:

I have no longer any desire for fame or fortune. My one ambition and my daily prayer is that I may live long enough to make beautiful the Capitol of the one country on earth in which there is liberty.

What Painting Techniques Did Brumidi Use?

The corridors were painted in a variety of techniques, including tempera, oil, and fresco. Brumidi was a master of *buon fresco* (true fresco), a technique in which the artist rapidly paints on a moist mortar surface with a mixture of mineral colors and water. The colors are immediately absorbed by the mortar and become an integral part of the wall once the surface cures. The process allows the artist little room for error.

Brumidi employed an artistic technique known as *trompe l'oeil* (fool the eye) in the corridors. This process is designed to make the images appear three-dimensional rather than flat.



The Cession of Louisiana, a fresco by Brumidi

Restoration of the Brumidi Corridors

Since they were first painted in the 1850s, the wall and ceiling decorations of the Brumidi Corridors have been repaired many times. In the past, such repair work included repeated retouching, repainting, and varnishing. Over time, these treatments camouflaged the decorations' original appearance and presented a darker, flatter version of Brumidi's inspired work.

In the past few years, however, professional conservators have begun to restore the corridor decoration to its original appearance. Each of the lunette paintings with historical scenes has been restored, and recovery of the elaborate wall paintings is presently underway. In the recently completed Patent Corridor, the visitor is now able to see, for the first time in a hundred years, the delicacy and vibrance of the original wall decoration.

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THE BRUMIDI CORRIDORS



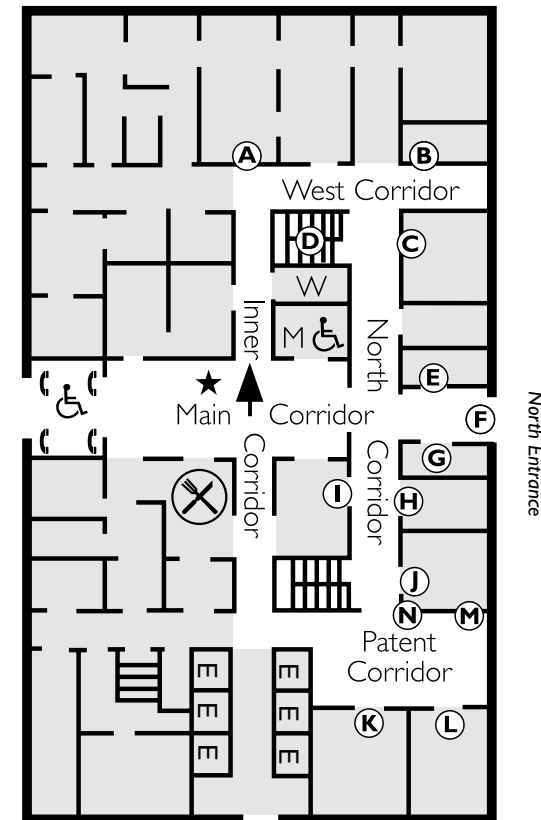
THE BRUMIDI CORRIDORS



Robert Morris. Also represented in this corridor are the twelve signs of the zodiac (B) and more than 40 American bird species. See how many you can identify.

North Corridor

As you head east, into the north corridor, notice the many images of American fauna such as squirrels, snakes, and chipmunks, as well as representations of American culture such as agricultural implements and modern inventions. In the 19th century, room S-124 housed the Committee on Territories; above the doorway is the fresco *The Cession of Louisiana* (C). In this painting, Robert Livingston, James Monroe, and the Marquis Barbe-Marbois are depicted negotiating the Louisiana Purchase.



Map of the Brumidi Corridors, U.S. Senate. Tour begins at the Senate Gift Shop desk (★)

Where To Begin Your Self-Guided Tour

The Brumidi Corridors are composed of five different hallways, known as the main, west, inner, north, and Patent corridors. Your self-guided tour will begin at the Senate Gift Shop desk, located in the main corridor (see map).

When you tour the Brumidi Corridors, remember that the walls are works of fine art. For their safety and preservation, we ask that you look closely, but do not touch.

Where you stand now, within the main and inner corridors, the hallways are painted with plants, fruits, and small animals. You will notice that the larger murals and portraits included in the other areas are not part of the design in the main and inner corridors. To view some of the fuller treatments, turn west at the Senate Gift Shop desk and walk through the inner corridor towards the Appropriations Committee Room.

West Corridor

Above room S-128 is the fresco titled *Bellona, the Roman Goddess of War* (A). Brumidi often related his art to the use of a room, and S-128 was first occupied by the Committee on Military Affairs. Throughout the west corridor are medallion portraits of signers of the Declaration of Independence including John Jay, Roger Sherman, and



Bellona, the Roman Goddess of War, a fresco by Brumidi

To the south is an ornate bronze staircase designed by Brumidi (D). Many of the sculpted figures within the railing are similar to the images painted in the hallways. Throughout the north corridor are medallion portraits of Revolutionary leaders. How many of them do you recognize today?

Mid-way through the north corridor is the intersection with the north entrance. This small hallway contains several Brumidi portraits including Chancellor James Kent (E), Chancellor Robert Livingston (F), and Justice Joseph Story (G). The tempera ceiling in this area is original, and shows how all the ceilings of the Brumidi Corridors were once decorated.

As you continue through the north corridor, past the north entrance, you will see two areas recently completed by 20th century artists. In 1975 Allyn Cox painted *The Moon Landing* (H), and in 1987 Charles Schmidt completed the space shuttle *Challenger* and its crew (I). These artists did not use fresco, but painted with oil paint on canvas, which was later applied to the wall. Above room S-118 is the fresco titled *The Signing of the First Treaty*

of Peace with Great Britain (J). This Brumidi mural depicts the 1782 peace negotiations between John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Henry Laurens, and British representative Richard Oswald.

Patent Corridor

At the east end of the north corridor lies the Patent Corridor. This large, open area contains three Brumidi frescoes, all of inventors. Above room S-116, formerly the Committee on Patents, is an image of Robert Fulton with his steamboat, the *Clermont*, on the Hudson River (K). Also portrayed in this corridor are Benjamin Franklin (L) and John Fitch (M). To the left of the Fitch painting is a marble bust of Constantino Brumidi (N), sculpted by American artist Jimilu Mason in 1967.



Restored lime-wash fresco in the Patent Corridor, by Brumidi