

Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

April 11, 2012

THIS WEEK: IOWA STATE CAPITOL MOSAICS

**BACKGROUND:
FREDERICK DIELMAN**

Born in Germany in 1847, Frederick Dielman was an illustrator and figure painter. Dielman designed the six mosaic panels in the Iowa State Capitol along the east wall on the third floor. The mosaics were actually made in Venice, Italy, and shipped to the Capitol. The mosaics in the Capitol represent the three branches of government, education, defense, and charities.

Iowa State Capitol Mosaics

(Taken from *Capitol of Iowa* (August 8, 1913) by W.A. Duckworth)

The six "Dielman mosaics" in the grand stairway located over the Blashfield painting, are the largest and most carefully wrought mosaics in America. The six panels are each about six feet wide by fourteen feet high. The manner of making and placing these mosaics is little understood and interesting. A brief history of them follows:

Frederick Dielman, the noted artist (several years president of the National Academy of Design of New York) made perfectly finished oil paintings of the subjects, one-third the actual size of these mosaics. He also made outline drawings on paper the actual size of the panels. He then took the small painting and large drawings to the "Venetian Murano Co.," in Venice and had these mosaics made. In making them the artisans placed the large drawings on tables and stood the small paintings before them. Then out of thousands of little pigeon holes around the room, the workmen selected the bits of mosaics and laid them in the large outline on the table, copying the small painting in this manner. These mosaics are made of glass to imitate marble. When the mosaics were all laid, brown paper was pasted over the entire surface. The brown paper surface was then divided into sections, as a state is divided into counties. These sections were then numbered in order, and the paper cut on these section lines. The sections were lifted, placed in boxes, and sent to Des Moines.



Frederick Dielman

(b. December 25, 1847 – d. August 25, 1935)

Signor Grandi, who superintended the laying of the mosaics, came with them and placed them on the wall where they are likely to remain for centuries. The wall was given a coat of Portland cement,

and the different sections were set in their places. After a few days when the cement had hardened, the brown paper that was pasted over their faces while in Italy, was wet and removed, leaving the mosaic pictures exposed to view for the first time in an upright position.



Iowa State Capitol Mosaics

The reason for using mosaics instead of paint was to get as much of an architectural feeling in these panels as possible, and to avoid conflict or rivalry between them and the Blasfield painting below. Another reason was to give the Dielman mosaics carrying power enough to overcome the extra distance from the spectator. It will be observed that the mosaics have been made to take up the color and feeling of the architecture about them, while the Blasfield painting in the more conspicuous panels below is more pronounced in color.

Mr. Dielman has made a picture of the West front of the state house as background for the four central panels, while in the left hand panel called "Defense," he has shown a portion of the state historical building, and in the background of the right hand panel, called "Education," he has shown a part of the old state house at

Iowa City, which is now the administration building of the state university.

The six subjects representing the functions of government, from left to right are:

First. "Defense," represented by two youths leaving their work in the field in answer to a call to arms.

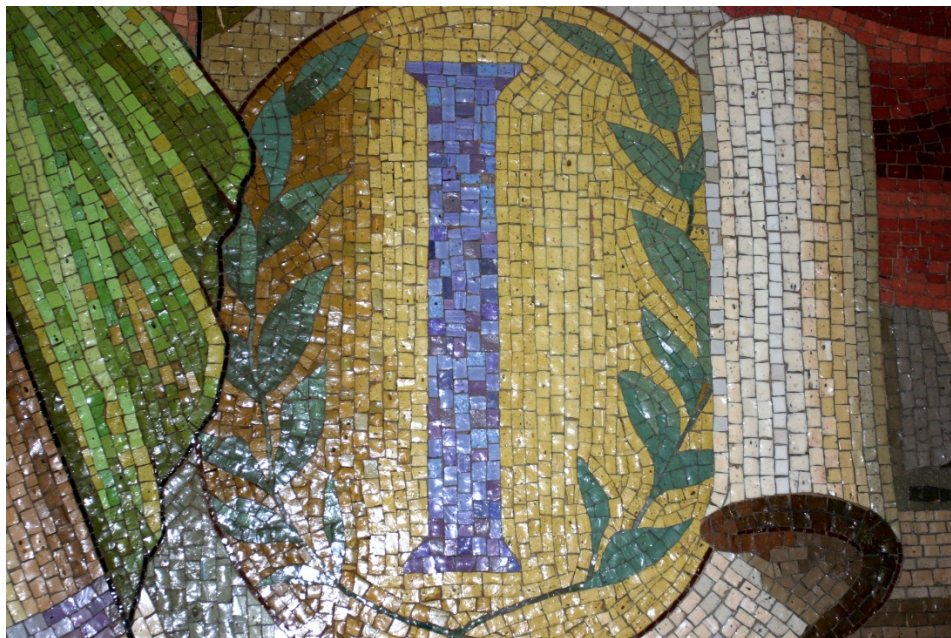
Second. "Charities," represented by a standing female figure, holding a helpless child in one arm while she gives relief to a crippled beggar who kneels at her side.

Third. "The Executive,"

Fourth. "Legislative," and

Fifth. "Judiciary," branches of government.

Sixth. "Education," typified by a standing female figure, in academic robe, with a wreath of laurel about her head.



"I" for "Iowa"



Defense



Charities



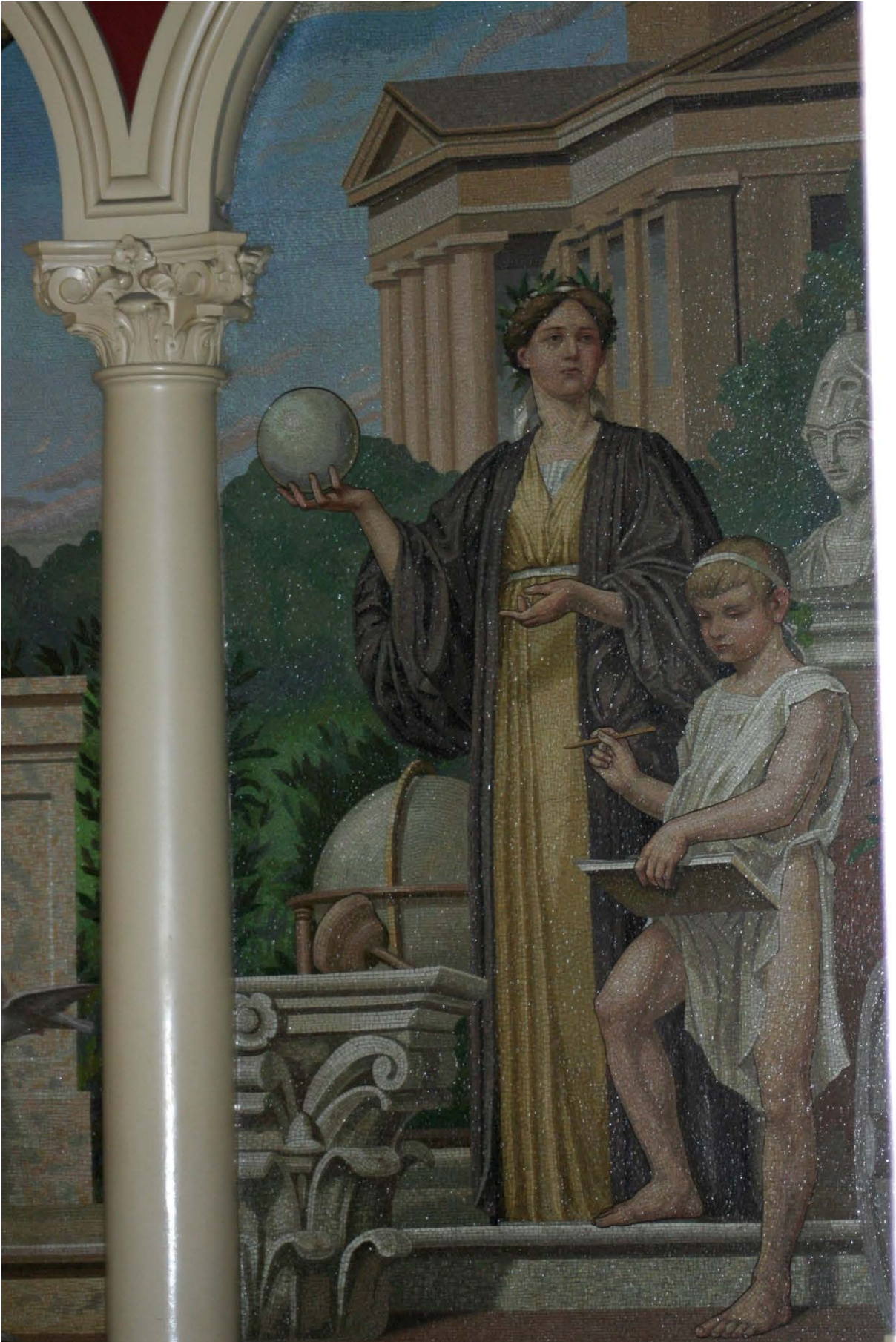
Executive



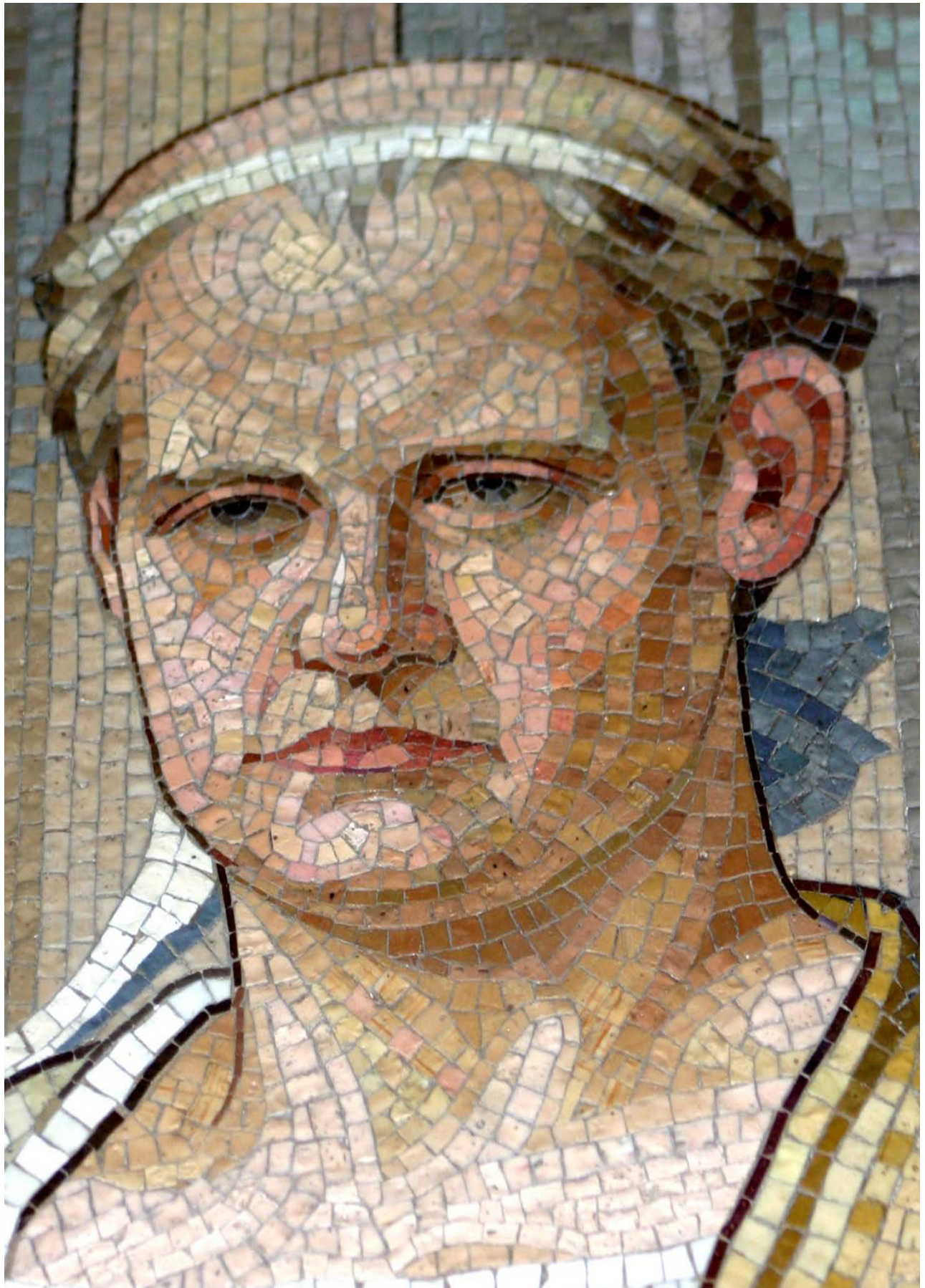
Legislature



Judiciary



Education



Legislature close-up