

# Chronology of Constantino Brumidi's Life and Work

(COMPILED WITH JULIE A. ARONSON)

*Note: Events in italics are provided for context*

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| <p><b>1805</b>     <b>July 26.</b> Born in Rome, Italy, the only surviving child of Stauro Brumidi of Greece and Anna Maria Bianchini of Rome, owners of a coffee shop at number 26, Via Tor de' Conti.</p> <p><b>c. 1818</b>     Begins a fourteen-year study of art at Accademia di San Luca (Academy of St. Luke), headed by Antonio Canova. Studies sculpture with Bertel Thorwaldsen and painting with Vincenzo Camuccini.</p> <p><b>1821–1823</b> Wins prizes at the academy, including a fifth prize for his copy of a sculpture of Apollo, a second prize for his copy of a painting of a cupid by Gaspare Landi (former teacher at the academy), and a commendation for his copy of a painting by Landi. Signs a student petition to have life models.</p> <p><b>1829</b>     <b>April 25.</b> Death of his father.</p> <p><b>1832</b>     <b>June 30.</b> Marries Maria Covaluzzi, a widow, age 35.<br/><b>August 15.</b> Birth of his daughter, Maria Elena Brumidi (known as Elena).</p> <p><b>1836</b>     Begins work for the Torlonia family. For Alessandro Torlonia in the Palazzo Torlonia, Piazza Venezia, he paints a frieze with the glory of Constantine and the family coat of arms in the throne room. For Marino Torlonia, decorates a neogothic chapel in the park of the Villa de Porta Pia at an unknown date.</p> <p><b>1837</b>     <b>August.</b> Death of his mother.<br/><br/>Commissioned to create a sculpture for the Weld-Clifford Chapel in church of San Marcello al Corso; chapel dedicated in 1842.</p> <p><b>1838</b>     <b>June.</b> Death of his wife.<br/><b>October 17.</b> Marries Anna Rovelli, age 16.</p> <p><b>1840</b>     With Domenico Tojetti, restores the eleventh bay and the end wall dedicated to Pope Gregory XVI in the third Loggia of the</p> | <p>Vatican Palace, under the supervision of Camuccini and Filippo Agricola.</p> <p>Paints frescoes in the neogothic family chapel designed by G.B. Caretti on the third floor of the Palazzo Torlonia, Piazza Venezia. Also paints Roman stories in the galleries on the second floor.</p> <p><b>1841</b>     <i>Construction of the theater of the Villa Torlonia begins.</i></p> <p><b>1842</b>     <b>January 19.</b> Birth of his son, Giuseppe Antonio Raffaello Brumidi.<br/><b>March.</b> Work on the Third Loggia completed.<br/><br/><b>September.</b> Commissioned to decorate a new building, presumably the theater, in the Villa Torlonia, Via Nomentana.</p> <p><b>1844/1845</b> Signs and dates two scenes in the theater of the Villa Torlonia. Was probably in charge of all of the extensive mural decoration.</p> <p><b>1846</b>     <i>Pope Pius IX takes office and introduces democratic reforms.</i><br/><br/>Proposes a new avenue from the Quirinale, the pope's palace, to the Vatican, with a monumental bridge and a triumphal arch in honor of Pope Pius IX. At an unknown date, works in the Quirinale.</p> <p><b>1847</b>     <b>March.</b> Creates a lithograph honoring the pope.<br/><i>July 5. Civic guard of citizens aged twenty-one to sixty authorized by the pope.</i><br/><br/>Serves as a captain in the civic guard.<br/><br/><b>December.</b> Petitions the pope to be named assistant to Agricola, the inspector of public paintings in Rome. Request denied because the position did not exist.<br/><br/>Paints portrait of Pope Pius IX, of which he makes a number of copies.</p> |
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- 1848–1850** Paints fifteen oil portrait studies of early popes as models for the frieze of St. Paul's Outside the Walls (executed in mosaic between 1851 and 1872).
- 1848** **May 11.** Requests appointment to the position of assistant superintendent of sacred apostolic palaces; request supported by the pope but not granted.  
**September.** Tries to resign from the civic guard.  
*November 15. Pope flees Rome after assassination of prime minister Pellegrino Rossi.*
- 1849** *February 9. Declaration of the Roman Republic, followed by the election of a triumvirate.*  
*April 12. French troops land at Civitavecchia, preparing to attack Rome.*  
**May 3.** As a captain of the civic guard, removes articles for safekeeping when ordered to seize the Monastery of S. Francesca Romana and others to house troops.  
*June 4. French troops enter Rome.*  
**July 17.** Applies to the Roman Republic for a position.
- 1850** *April 12. Pope restored to power by French troops. Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli named Secretary of State.*  
Paints frescoes in the Church of the Madonna dell' Archetto (dedicated May 31, 1851).  
Has a studio in the parish of S. Maria de' Monti.  
In contact with John Hughes, archbishop of New York, and American priest John Norris about decoration of St. Stephen's Church.
- 1851** **February 4.** Arrested and imprisoned in connection with revolutionary activities.  
**February 22.** Pleads innocent to accusations of stealing church property.  
**June 4.** Asks to leave for the United States to decorate churches as planned before arrest. Is moved to a harsher prison and suffers ill health.  
*June 11. Thomas U. Walter appointed Architect of the Capitol. Edward Clark comes to Washington, D.C., to be his assistant.*  
*July 4. Cornerstone for the Capitol Extension laid.*
- October/November.** Requests permission from the Secretary of State and the French general to leave for the United States.  
**December.** Trial on charges stemming from revolutionary activities. Found guilty in spite of supporting testimony.
- 1852** **January 2.** Sentenced to eighteen years in prison.  
**January 31.** Sentence reduced by two-thirds.  
**March 21.** Released from prison after pardon by the pope.  
**September 18.** Arrives in New York City.  
**November 29.** Files document of intent to become a United States citizen in Court of Common Pleas, New York City.  
Signs and dates portrait of Emery Bemis of Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 1853** *March 23. President Franklin Pierce transfers jurisdiction over the Capitol from the Department of the Interior to the Department of War, headed by Jefferson Davis.*  
*March 29. Montgomery C. Meigs appointed Supervising Engineer of the Capitol Extension.*  
Signs and dates portrait of Eveline F. Freeman of Massachusetts and tondo *Progress* for the Bennitt family of New York.
- 1854** **May 5.** In Mexico City, painting a Holy Trinity for the Cathedral.  
*November. Meigs tries to persuade Emmerich Carstens to come from New York to be foreman of decorative painters.*  
**December 12.** Leaves Mexico for New Orleans in the company of "Mary Brumidi" and bronze worker Federico Casali.  
**December 28.** At the Capitol in Washington, D.C., is introduced to Meigs, who suggests he paint a sample fresco in a lunette in his office, intended for the House Committee on Agriculture (H-144).
- 1855** **January.** Living at 308 Delaware Avenue [N.E.], between B and C streets, near the Capitol.  
**January 29.** Exhibits paintings in Mexico City.  
*February 3. Congress appropriates \$100,000 for a new dome for the Capitol.*

**February 19.** Having prepared an oil sketch and cartoon, begins to paint the fresco of Cincinnatus (H-144).

Completes a color sketch for *Martyrdom of St. Stephen* for St. Stephen's Church in New York City.

**March 17.** Finishes Cincinnatus fresco.

**March 20.** Secretary of War Jefferson Davis inspects the fresco and authorizes Meigs to employ Brumidi at \$8.00 per day to continue work and to pay him retroactively.

**March 30.** Has finished sketch representing the Four Seasons and begins working on cartoons.

**November 9.** Has completed the ceiling and all but the Putnam lunette (H-144).

*December. American Party (Know Nothings) at its height in the 34th Congress.*

Submits proposal in French listing subjects for the Senate Reception Room.

1856

**April 1.** Has completed frescoes in Agriculture Committee Room (H-144).

**July 28.** Submits three sketches for paintings in the Senate Reception Room (S-213).

**August 6.** Meigs approves design for the Ladies Waiting Room (S-313A) [not executed].

**August 20.** Meigs approves the sketch for the room of the Committee on Naval Affairs (S-127).

*October. First article criticizing use of foreign artists at the Capitol appears in The Crayon.*

**By November.** Work in the Naval Affairs Committee Room (S-127) in progress.

*November. Washington Art Association founded by Horatio Stone.*

**December 4.** Installs oil-on-canvas altarpiece in St. Ignatius Church in Baltimore.

**December.** Exhibits *Holy Trinity* in Mexico City.

Signs and dates *Martyrdom of St. Stephen* for St. Stephen's Church, New York City.

1857

*Dispute begins between Walter and Meigs over the superintendency of the architecture and the decoration in the Capitol.*

**February 16.** Submits designs for the proposed Senate Library (S-211); is requested

to design the House Chamber ceiling and Senate desks and chairs.

*March 7. Newly inaugurated President James Buchanan appoints John B. Floyd Secretary of War.*

**March 27.** Requested by Meigs to design railings for the private staircases.

**April 3.** Pay raised to \$10.00 per day.

**July.** Death of his friend Frederick Casali, head of the Capitol bronze foundry.

**October-December.** Paints *Cornwallis Sues for Cessation of Hostilities* in House Chamber and signs it: "C Brumidi Artist Citizen of the U.S."

**November 12.** Files final naturalization papers in U.S. Circuit Court, District of Columbia.

*December 16. House of Representatives meets in new hall.*

1858

Living at 63 Indiana Avenue [N.W.].

Completes one lunette and one corner group in Senate Post Office (S-211) and two of five lunettes in room of Senate Committee on Military Affairs (S-128).

Decorative painting ongoing in first-floor Senate corridors.

*March 20. Memorial to Congress requesting the foundation of an art commission is drafted and signed by 127 artists at National Art Association convention.*

**April.** Conflict with Johannes Oertel over the painting of the Senate Library (S-211).

*April 30. Appropriations for Capitol construction expired and workers discharged.*

*May 19. Proposed amendment to the Capitol appropriation specifies that a committee of three artists appointed by the president recommend designs for approval by the Joint Committee on the Library.*

*May 28. Jefferson Davis defends Meigs and Brumidi's decoration during debate in Senate.*

*May 31. Memorial of artists presented to the House, which forms a select committee of five members to consider it.*

*June 12. Civil Appropriation Bill passed, with a provision that no expenditures for sculpture or paintings could be made without the approval of the committee of three artists and the Joint Committee on the Library, with the ex-*

*ception of the work in progress by Crawford and Rogers.*

**By November 15.** Completes frescoes in the spandrels of the southern domed section of the Senate Reception Room (S-213).

**December.** Clashes with Emmerich Carstens, foreman of decorative painters, over superintendence of workers.

1859

**March 3.** Signs sketch depicting scenes of American history for a fresco in illusionistic sculptural relief for the Rotunda frieze.

*"American Artists," report of House select committee, recommends formation of art commission.*

**March 17.** Carstens dismissed by Secretary of War.

**May 15.** Art Commission appointed by the President; members are Henry Kirke Brown, James R. Lambdin, and John F. Kennsett.

**June 6.** Pays for the burial of Clara Scarselli Brumidi, age 36, born in Rome.

**June 15.** First meeting of the Art Commission.

**October.** Meigs reports that decorative painting in the first-floor Senate corridor is almost complete.

**October 3.** Altarpiece installed at St. Aloysius Church in Washington.

**November 1.** Meigs relieved of duty and replaced by William B. Franklin.

**December 1.** Work on the Capitol suspended except for some painting in the corridors.

**December 9.** Date inscribed on Thomas U. Walter's drawing of section of new dome, which includes a canopy for a fresco by Brumidi.

1860

Listed in census as living at 485 D Street North [N.E.] with eighteen-year-old English woman, undoubtedly Lola Germon.

Signs and dates murals in the President's Room (S-216).

**February 22.** Art Commission submits a report highly critical of foreign treatment of the Capitol decoration.

**June 20.** Art Commission abolished.

**July 1.** Work on the Capitol resumes.

1861

**February 27.** Meigs ordered by Secretary of War to resume charge of the Capitol Extension.

**March.** Carstens sworn in as "Foreman of Ornamental Painting."

**April 12.** *The Civil War begins. Troops stationed at the Capitol from April 18 through May.*

**May 12.** Birth of his son, Laurence Stauros Brumidi.

**May 15.** *Work on the Capitol extensions suspended, although ironwork on dome continued.*

**June 13.** *Meigs appointed Quartermaster General of the Army.*

**August-December.** Paid out of Senate Contingent Fund, along with the assistants, for decorating Senate corridors and repairing other decoration in Senate wing.

1862

Living at 128 Second Street West [N.W.].

**April 16.** *Jurisdiction over Capitol shifted from War Department to Interior Department under Caleb B. Smith.*

**April 30.** *Work on extensions resumed.*

**May.** Signs and dates a proposal for an elevated railroad on Broadway in New York City.

**August 18.** Walter requests a design for the canopy fresco.

**August 31.** *Capitol used as a hospital for troops through October.*

**September 8.** Submits a design with the description of the *Apotheosis of Washington* and requests \$50,000.

**October.** Estimates cost of completing rooms in the Capitol. In Philadelphia at end of the month.

**December 17.** Agrees to accept \$40,000 for the canopy fresco.

1863

**January 3.** Proposal for the canopy fresco accepted for \$40,000.

**February-May.** Decorating Walter's new house in Germantown, Pennsylvania, with several assistants from the Capitol.

**March 11.** Notified to proceed with the cartoons for the canopy in real fresco.

**March 30.** Carpenters finish wooden model of Rotunda canopy made to assist Brumidi in preparing cartoons.

**May 16.** Draws figures of Vulcan and Ceres for the clock designed by Walter for the Senate Chamber.

- May.** Contract questioned by Secretary of Interior I. P. Usher; Brumidi ordered to suspend operations.
- July 7.** Secretary of Interior agrees to resumption of work on the canopy fresco.
- November 6.** Completes cartoons for the canopy for a payment of \$10,000 total; pay suspended until construction of the dome is further advanced.
- 1864** Decorates the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia with frescoes and murals.
- November.** Lola Brumidi purchases house at 128 Second Street West [N.W.], where they live together until 1870.
- December 3.** Ironwork of the canopy complete and ready for fresco.
- Paints in fresco in the Sergeant-at-Arms Room (S-212); central ceiling panel remains unfilled.
- 1865** **May 16.** Walter notes completion of the center group of the canopy fresco and the commencement of Science group.
- May 26. Walter resigns, three days after being placed under the Commissioner of Public Buildings.*
- July 15.** Appropriation for the dome exhausted, but Brumidi continues to work.
- August.** Sends painting *The Five Senses* to Walter's family.
- August 30. Edward Clark appointed Architect of the Capitol Extension and New Dome.*
- September 3.** Meigs asks that his portrait be removed from the Commerce group in the canopy fresco.
- September.** Painting last group on the canopy; fresco is signed and dated 1865. Expresses concern about the junctures between the sections of plaster. Clark recommends payment.
- October.** In Philadelphia.
- 1866** **January 9.** Scaffolding for canopy fresco dismantled during the following week.
- June 9.** Paid balance of the contract price, subtracting \$500, to be paid when joints between the giornate are toned and blended.
- July.** Prepares estimates after Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds requests that unfinished rooms (S-211, 212, and 213) be completed. Edward Clark objects to higher prices.
- July.** In Philadelphia through September.
- November 19.** Secretary of Interior seeks congressional authorization for frieze.
- 1867** **January.** In Havana, Cuba.
- March 29.** Has returned to Washington and is working in the Capitol.
- By November 1.** Ceiling of Senate Post Office (S-211) completed.
- 1868** No work at the Capitol documented.
- Signs and dates monumental crucifixion mural and *Assumption of the Virgin* in St. Stephen's Church, New York City.
- 1869** Paints *Liberty* and *Union* in oil on canvas for the entrance hall of the White House.
- By November.** Adds four frescoes to Senate Reception Room (S-213).
- 1870** Takes mortgage on house at 128 2nd Street, N.W.; Lola Brumidi living at 326 A Street, S.E.
- June.** In New York. Sends designs for lunettes of the Senate Reception Room (S-213). Says he will be in Washington in July.
- November 22.** Paid for painting chiaroscuro figures on south wall of Senate Reception Room (S-213).
- 1871** **April.** In New York working at St. Stephen's Church.
- October 19.** Paid for three frescoes of the American Revolution to complete decoration of Senate Military Affairs Committee Room (S-128).
- Nov. 23.** Paid for painting chiaroscuro figures in the three lunettes in the Senate Reception Room (S-213); spaces designated for portraits remain vacant.
- Visited by his daughter Elena, who lives in Rome.
- 1872** **August-September.** In New York working at St. Stephen's Church.
- 1873** **May 26.** Paid for mural of Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson on south wall of Senate Reception Room (S-213).
- September.** Working in dining room of Senator Justin Morrill's house.
- November 28.** Paid for Robert Fulton fresco in lunette in the Patent Corridor, first floor of Senate wing.

- Signs and dates *Crucifixion* for Academy of Mount Saint Vincent, Riverdale, New York.
- 1874** **June 21.** Paid for four monochrome profile portrait medallions in Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Room (S-118).
- August.** Lives temporarily at Marini Hall (914-916 E Street), where he works on cartoons. Has "rheumatic attack" in his knees, affecting his ability to walk.
- By November 1.** Has completed fresco *Signing of the First Treaty of Peace with Great Britain* in corridor outside Committee on Foreign Affairs Room (S-118).
- Thanksgiving.** Hospitalized, possibly for rheumatism.
- 1875** **May.** Asked to make portraits for library of Senator Justin S. Morrill's house.
- By November 1.** Completes two frescoes in Senate first-floor corridors: *The Cession of Louisiana* outside the Committee on Territories Room (S-124), and *Bellona* outside the Military Affairs Room (S-128).
- Also paints frescoes on ceiling of the Committee on the Library Room (S-129).
- Paints lunettes of *Columbus and the Indian Maiden* and *Authority Consults the Written Law* in the west corridor.
- 1876** Signs and dates the ceiling fresco *Columbia Welcoming the South Back into the Union* in the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Room (S-212).
- February.** Painting the lunette *Bartholomé de Las Casas* (S-133) in oil in the west corridor, first floor of Senate wing. Petitions to be allowed to finish uncompleted rooms.
- May.** Completes lunette depicting John Fitch in the Patent Corridor.
- 1877** **March.** Put back on the payroll at \$10.00 per day to paint the Rotunda frieze.
- May.** Begins work on cartoons for the frieze.
- 1878** Living at 911 G Street, N.W.
- April.** Paints first scene of frieze.
- August 24.** Paid for frescoes of Justice Joseph Story, Chancellor James Kent, and Chancellor Robert Livingston in Senate wing north entrance.
- September.** Scaffold for the frieze being adjusted. Begins the Pocahontas cartoon. Plagued by health problems, possibly hospitalized.
- Begins being hoisted up daily to frieze by a cage on a pulley.
- By October 15.** Has completed cartoons for the DeSoto segment of the frieze and is continuing work on Pocahontas cartoon.
- December 27.** Asks to suspend work on the frieze during cold weather.
- Paints *The Apparition of our Lord to St. Margaret Mary* for the Visitation Convent, Washington, D.C.
- 1879** Living at 911 G Street, N.W., with his son Laurence. The former Lola Brumidi, now Mrs. Walsh, purchases the house at 921 G Street, N.W.
- June 27.** Files will, leaving all possessions to his son Laurence.
- July.** Continues to work on cartoons for the frieze, but due to asthma cannot ascend to the scaffold.
- Early August.** In Orkney Springs, West Virginia, on doctor's orders, works on frieze cartoons.
- October 1.** Nearly falls from the scaffolding while painting the frieze, but returns to paint the next day.
- November.** Petitions to be placed back on the payroll for cartoons. Works on cartoons of Oglethorpe and Lexington.
- 1880** **January.** Works 27 days on cartoons for the frieze.
- February 19.** Dies in his home at 921 G St., N.W. Buried in Germon family plot at Glenwood Cemetery.
- March.** Filippo Costaggini asks to succeed Brumidi on the frieze.
- June.** Congress divides the \$500 due Brumidi between his children Laurence and Elena.