

“Statuary for the New York Custom House”

(located in Bowling Green, New York)

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The article begins:

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STATUARY FOR THE NEW YORK CUSTOM HOUSE.

LITTLE appreciable progress for months seemed to be made on the new Custom House in Bowling Green, New York. This was because of delay in the deliveries of granite and structural steel. An enormous structure like this may well tax the capacity of any quarry, and, although a large amount of stone had been gotten out and cut, it was set in the walls with such expedition that a halt had to be called in order to give an opportunity to the quarrymen and cutters to get a bit ahead. Two or three months ago, however, the work began to boom again, and now the eye of the casual passer can witness the progress made day by day. It will be months and months yet before any real idea of magnificence and beauty of building can be gained, save from a study of the architect's drawings.

New York is fast becoming one of the most notable cities in the world for its fine granite work. Aberdeen is known far and wide as the "Granite City," but this is because granite is the only building material used, and not that there is anything specially notable in the way of granite carving and ornamentation. We do not go in for polished granite fronts in this country, but we avail ourselves of the art of the sculptor and the stone-cutter to an extent that astounds foreign visitors. There are many splendid examples of granite work in lower New York. In dozens of tall buildings the granite courses are carried to the second story and higher, and there are elaborately carved entrances. Two of the finest of the modern sky-scrapers are entirely of granite,—the Empire building in white granite, and the Hanover Bank in pink. The list of granite buildings is to have two grand additions,—the Hall of Records, now almost completed, and the United States Custom House. These two structures will bear comparison with any public buildings in the country. Even without its sculptured adornment, the Custom House would attract wide attention by its combined richness and dignity. The design is perfectly suited to granite, an important point that, unfortunately, is not always considered. The stone that is chosen is one of the best of Maine granites. It is fairly coarse-grained, but homogeneous, and of admirable

working quality. There is just enough pink in the stone to soften the gray color, so that it is not cold and harsh like so many granites.

The Federal Government has been liberal in its allowance for this building. Having such a site it could scarcely be otherwise. The situation is one that is positively ideal for a great public building. At one side is Battery Park, the gateway of the city, so that the building will be distinctly visible to passengers on incoming steamers. In front is a little triangular park, and then, stretching away for miles, the greatest single thoroughfare in the world—Broadway. Mr. Cass Gilbert has proven himself on many occasions an architect of taste and discretion, but nothing will give more enduring credit to his reputation than this Custom House. Years ago the Government was content with buildings that were severely plain, probably seeking to carry out the idea of "democratic simplicity." But recently a more liberal and enlightened spirit is apparent, and Mr. Gilbert was given a free hand. In the interior he has provided for the use of the rarest and most beautiful marbles from all parts of the world. On the exterior there will be a profusion of statuary and sculptured work. It will all be symbolical and appropriate to all that pertains to a nation's commerce. Trading sculptors are now at work on groups and single figures, although little has passed the modeling stage as yet.

On the sidewalk in front of the building, on either side of the entrance, and at the corners, will be four huge pedestals, each one crowned with a sculptured group representing a continent or hemisphere. Europe and America will guard the central entrance, while Asia will be at the eastern corner and Africa at the western. The groups will each be 9½ feet high. Daniel C. French, the veteran sculptor, is at work on the models of these groups in his New York studio. To a reporter he explained his aims.

"In the statue of Europe I have sought to symbolize imperialism. A crown rests on her brow, and she holds her head high, as one long accustomed to command. Her left arm rests on a globe, signifying her control of the world's commerce, and over her right shoulder are the prows of three vessels, each emblematic of a powerful European nation, and ornamented with the heads of the lion, the bear and the eagle. Behind the globe is seated a figure which bends over an open book and which typifies the mediæval and ancient history of the continent. One hand holds a crowned skull. In the completed figure, and as one might not discern in the crude sketch, there will be an open book on the globe, symbolic of her learning and intellectual achievement.

"America does not symbolize a continent exactly. Instead, it is the Western Hemisphere. It symbolizes both North and South America. It expresses the triumph of mind over material things. It shows a young civilization, grown powerful through the development of its natural resources, in contrast to the ancient culture of Europe, whose might has been increased by foreign conquests and colonization. America is progressive, as shown by her aggressive attitude. The Indian crouching behind represents the disappearance of aboriginal savagery. The workman toiling over the wheel at her knee symbolizes the skilled labor which has contributed so powerfully

to her greatness. The sheaf of wheat across her knee betokens her agricultural wealth.

"Asia and Africa, continents which contrast with those two others as stagnant pools with rushing rivers. In Asia are represented stolidity and self-contentment. Her pose has all the serenity of an image of Buddha. Asia sits as in a stupor, doing nothing, only dreaming. On her right crouches a tiger, representative of her vast jungles, and on her left bow toiling figures emblematic of her teeming populace, enslaved with ignorance and superstition.

"Africa, the slumbering continent. She herself half reclines, with her head bowed in sleep upon her breast. The lion beneath her left arm sleeps. The face of the Sphinx at her right is as expressionless as a dreamless sleep, but behind the Sphinx is arising a figure of power, alert and alive, typifying the spirit of Western civilization which has recently begun to conquer Africa."

In addition to these emblematic groups, twelve statues will stand in a long row on the cornice of the building level with the fifth floor. They will be shown against pilasters dividing the spaces between the windows. These statues will typify ancient and modern lands and civilizations, but only those, of course, that had to do with the development of commerce. From left to right there will be figures of Greece, Rome, Phœnicia, Genoa, Venice, Spain, Holland, Portugal, Scandinavia, Germany, France and England. The figures of Greece and Rome are being executed by Elwell; Phœnicia, by Ruckstuhl; Genoa, by Lukeman; Venice and Spain, by Tonetti; Holland and Portugal, by Louis St. Gaudens; Scandinavia, by Gelert; Germany, by Jaegers, and France and England by Grafly. The interdependence of America and Europe, therefore, is shown not alone in the statuary, but also in the sculptors themselves, most of whom are of foreign birth.

In the centre of the building's front and above the statuary of the cornice there will be a great shield, whose summit will lack only four feet of being level with the roof, and which will be 130 feet above the street. It will bear the arms of the United States, flanked by two winged figures and crowned with the outstretched wings of an eagle. This is the work of Karl Bitter.

As one enters the building one will see in the centre of the archway and above the inner door the seal of the city of New York, which will also be supported by winged images and crowned with an eagle, the work of O'Connor.

Besides these predominating sculptural features, the building will be ornamented by many other sculptured heads and figures. The keystone of the entrance arch will be fashioned into the head of Columbia, the work of Alfano, and two mountain lion heads will peer out of the wall at either end of the dedicatory tablet, above the doorway. Many of the keystones of the windows will also have the form of human heads.

The entire sculptural scheme was planned, of course, by Mr. Gilbert, as one mind has to conceive and arrange features like these in order to keep them in harmony. While this is the most elaborate of all sculptural decoration in New York, unless the Appellate Court on Madison Avenue is excepted, it is a pleasure to notice how large a part sculpture is taking in modern high-

class city building. In the half a dozen blocks between Bowling Green and the Postoffice there are some excellent examples of sculpture, in addition to the four bronze statues that adorn the Astor Court building. There is also excellent statuary on the Hall of Records, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Stock Exchange.
