

ARCHIVES OF THE UN

THESE WALLS CAN TALK

When John Russell Pope designed the National Archives Building in 1931, he understood the prominence of its location—halfway between the Capitol and the White House—and the importance of its mission to protect the documents of the past so they may inform the future. To convey this fact, he ensured that symbolism and sculpture were integral parts of the building's design. More money was spent on the sculptural decorations on the National Archives Building than on decorations on any other structure in the Federal Triangle.

To execute his vision, Pope turned to James Earl Fraser and Adolf Alexander Weinman, two colleagues with whom he had worked in the past: with Fraser on the Theodore Roosevelt

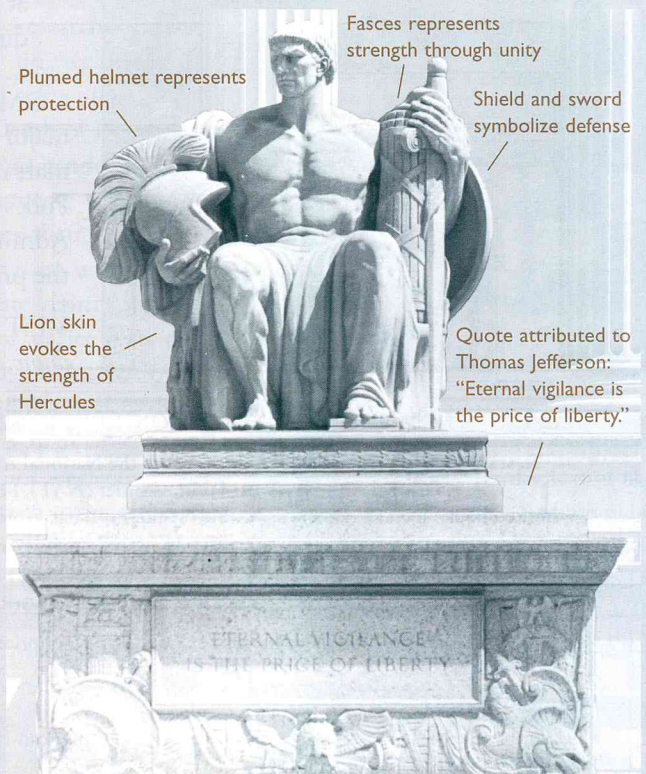
Memorial in New York City and the Second Division Memorial in Washington, D.C.; and with Weinman on the Scottish Rite Temple in Washington, D.C., and the Meuse-Argonne Memorial in Montfaucon, France. Sculptor Robert Aitken, who was also working on the west pediment of the Supreme Court building, was later brought on to aid in the National Archives' design.

The result of their work was the creation of what Pope called a "temple of American history," rife with symbolism and meaning. More information on the building can be found in *The National Archives Building: Temple of American History*, by Patty Mason, and published by the Foundation for the National Archives. The book is available in the Archives Shop in Washington, D.C., and other outlets.

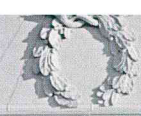
HERITAGE



GUARDIANSHIP



Flanking the Constitution Avenue entrance are statues representing Heritage and Guardianship, symbols of the National Archives' duty to protect the past and future heritage of the nation. The reliefs beneath each statue highlight their themes: objects associated with protection—swords, quivers of arrows, and shields—adorn Guardianship, while symbols of home—cornucopias, a plow, a lamp, and books—adorn Heritage. (Sculpted by Fraser)



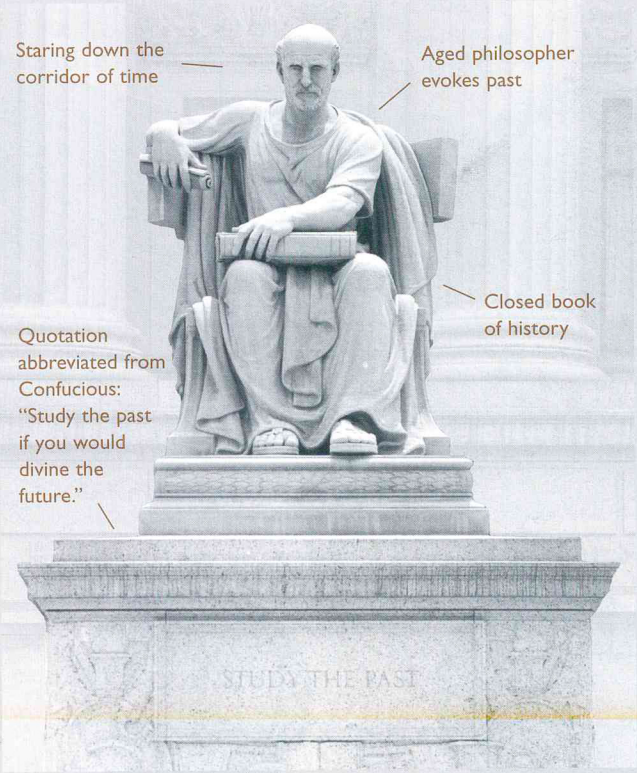
By ROB CROTTY

These four reliefs appear on Seventh Street, Ninth Street, and Constitution Avenue and contain symbolism found elsewhere in the building. The shield and armor symbolize protection, while lamps signify enlightenment and owls represent wisdom. The staff of intertwining snakes represents the Roman god Mercury, while the shield of Athena—inlaid with the head of Medusa—also invokes protection.

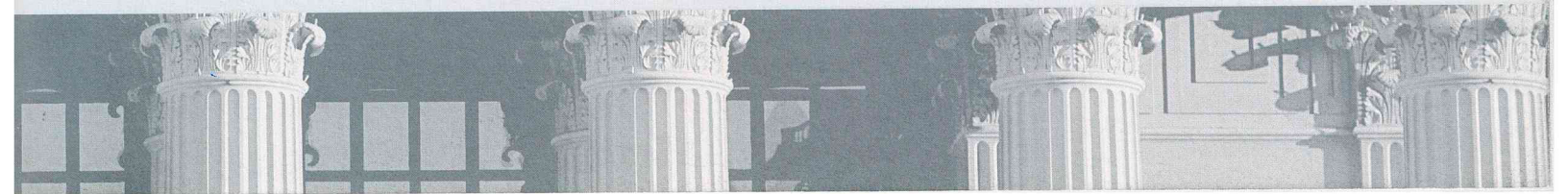


FUTURE

PAST

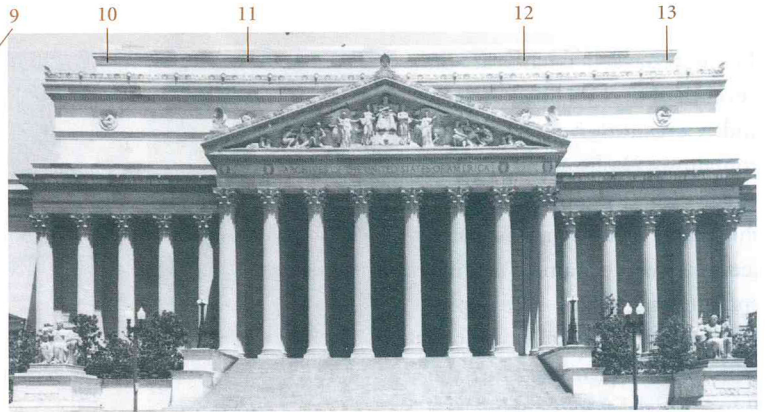


Complementing the "Destiny" pediment above them on Pennsylvania Avenue, Future and Past, and their related quotations, remind observers that the future depends on an understanding of the past and, implicitly, the documents held in the National Archives. (Sculpted by Aitken)





PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE



CONSTITUTION AVENUE

ATTIC MEDALLIONS: "Around the attic story are twelve discs representing departments of the federal government that send their valuable documents into the keeping of the new custodians," wrote John Russell Pope. These discs, created by Fraser and Aitken, are each eight feet in diameter and represent the House, Senate, and the 10 executive departments that existed in 1936. The Great Seal of the United States rests between the Senate and House medallions on Constitution Avenue.

1. DEPT. OF COMMERCE



Represented by a figure holding a box filled with jewelry and beads, items symbolic of trade. (Fraser)

2. DEPT. OF THE INTERIOR



Represented by a seated figure with rope in his hands, ready to harness the natural resources of the country, indicated by the waterfall in the background. (Fraser)

3. DEPT. OF LABOR



Represented by a youthful figure with the attributes of industry: a hammer, the wheel of progress, and an anvil. (Aitken)

4. THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Represented by a figure holding a mace—the emblem of the House—with documents and books in the background. (Aitken)

5. GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES



Emblematic of the United States as a whole, symbolically centered between the House and Senate medallions. (Aitken)

6. THE SENATE



Represented by a figure holding the fasces of Government and a book containing the laws of the nation. (Aitken)

7. DEPT. OF THE POST OFFICE



Represented by a mailbag and a winged sphere, signifying speed. (Aitken)

8. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

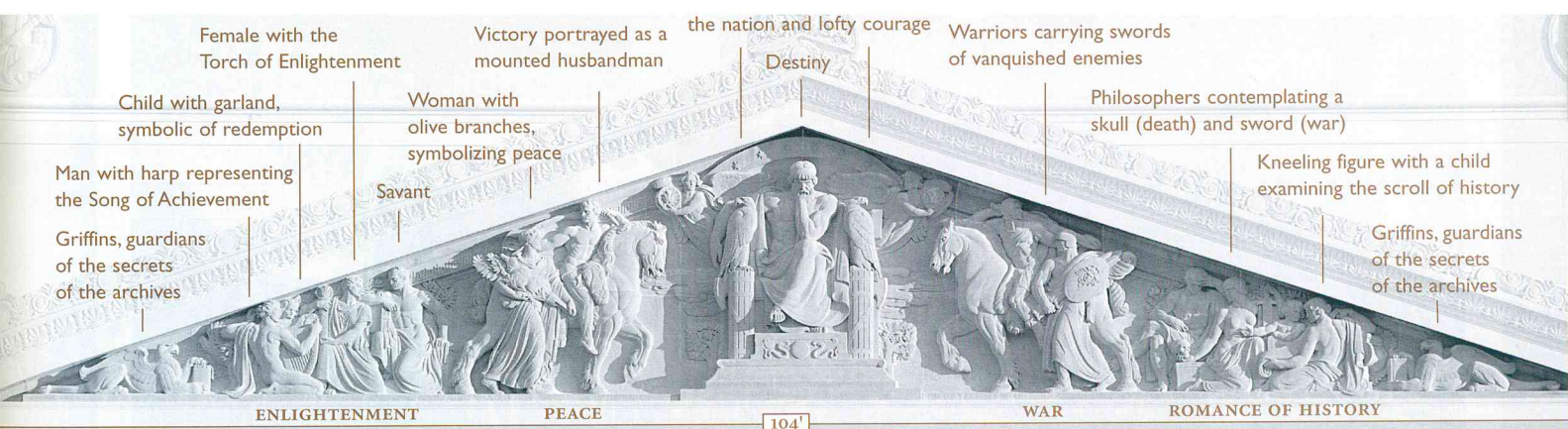


Represented by a farmer holding a sheaf of wheat and a scythe. (Aitken)

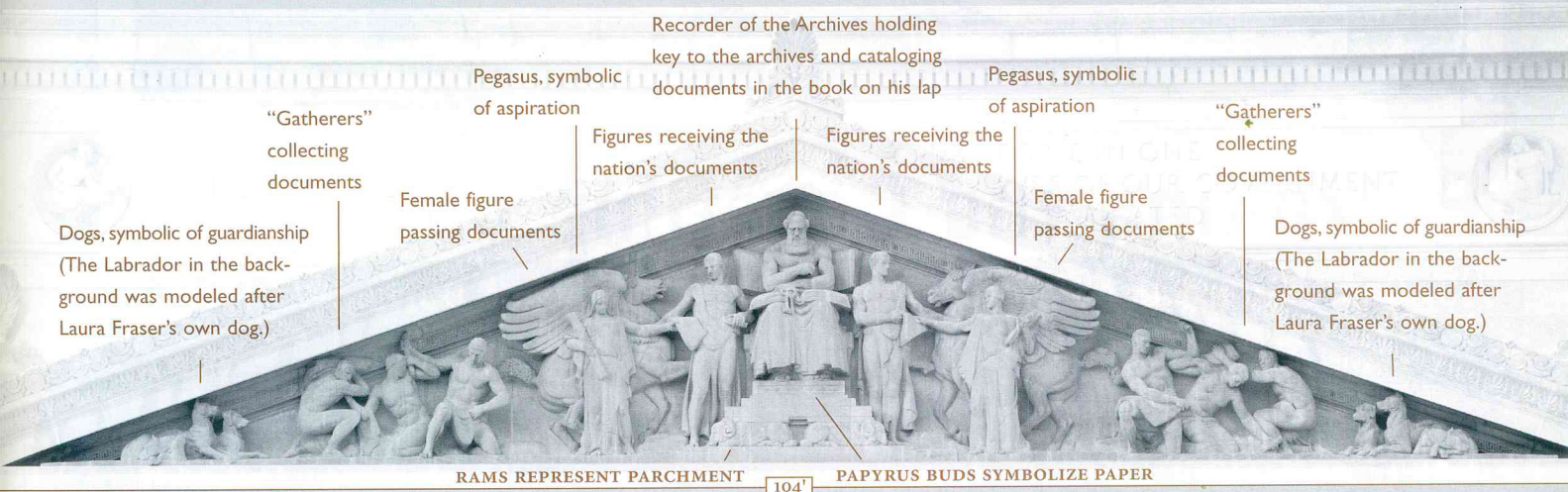
9. DEPT. OF JUSTICE



Represented as a figure holding the Statute of Books of the Law and "the Reins of Guidance." (Aitken)



“**DESTINY**,” the Pennsylvania Avenue pediment, was designed by Adolph Alexander Weinman. In it, Destiny (at center) is flanked by the opposing forces of Peace and War, implying that the country’s future is dependent on its knowledge of the past, a message repeated in Robert Aitken’s sculptures below it (Future and Past). This pediment, as well as the corresponding one on Constitution Avenue, is one of the largest in America and the world, stretching 104 feet across and reaching a height of 18 feet at its center. Weinman also designed the sphinxes on display at the Scottish Rite Temple (16th and R Streets, NW), and the pediment at the Post Office building (12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW), both in Washington, D.C.



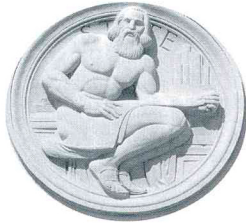
“**THE RECORDER OF THE ARCHIVES**” was designed by Fraser. The Recorder is receiving documents while dogs look on, symbolic of the Archives’ obligation to protect the nation’s past. Fraser also designed the two figures (Heritage and Guardianship) at the Constitution Avenue entrance—complementing the symbolism in the pediment. His other works include the design of the Buffalo Nickel and the sculpture *The End of the Trail*. James’s wife, Laura Fraser, helped model the pediment.

10. DEPT. OF WAR



Represented as a helmeted soldier with an arm resting on a sword. (Fraser)

11. DEPT. OF STATE



Represented as an elderly bearded figure (wisdom) with attendant parchments. (Fraser)

12. DEPT. OF THE TREASURY



Represented as a long-haired figure with a scepter and treasure chest symbolizing wealth. (Fraser)

13. DEPT. OF THE NAVY



Represented as a figure holding a ship with maritime accessories surrounding him. (Fraser)

