

“The Big Four”

Here's looking at you!



CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT ELIZABETH WEAVER, SPEAKER AT THE RECEPTION FOR THE BIG FOUR MURAL, AND PRESIDENT THOMAS E. BRENNAN.



THE MURAL, A 60x90-FOOT REPRODUCTION OF THE BIG FOUR, MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT JUSTICES WHO SERVED TOGETHER IN THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE COURT.



JUDGE BRENNAN LISTENS AS ARTIST TONY HENDRICK EXPLAINS THE MURAL PROJECT.

A 60-foot by 90-foot mural of four of the most famous jurists in Michigan Supreme Court history now adorns the south side of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School at 217 S. Capitol, Lansing.

The mural, a faithful reproduction of an oil painting donated to the Michigan State Bar some years ago, was painted by Tony Hendrick of Adams Outdoor Advertising in Lansing.

The art work portrays Michigan Supreme Court jurists Thomas M. Cooley, James V. Campbell, Benjamin Graves, and Isaac Christiancy, who served on the court together 1868-1875. The group was known as “The Big Four.” The jurists were known in legal circles throughout the country for their insightful decisions, and the Michigan Supreme Court was known at the time as a court of great intellectual leadership.

Judge Thomas E. Brennan, founder and president of Cooley, said the idea for the mural came from a staff member who E-mailed him about putting something on the side of the building. As former Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court (1969-70), Brennan quickly thought of having “The Big Four” painting reproduced.

To keep the art work moveable, in case it ever needed to be relocated, Adams came up with a plan to put the

portrait onto vinyl and affix it to the building. The frame for the portrait was connected directly into the school building’s I-beams to prevent wind damage.

The portrait was stretched onto the frame and hung for all to view Saturday, April 29, 2000.

Hendrick, the artist, said it took about four months to complete the painting. The vinyl, with the reproduction drawn on by Hendrick, was suspended on a roll.

Hendrick would unravel as much of the material as the ceilings at Adams would allow, and paint that portion of the work. When the oil paint dried, the finished part would be rolled up at the other end, and Hendrick would unravel the next part of the painting to work on.

Hendrick, 30, is a resident of Mulliken, Mich., and a graduate of the Kansas City Artist Institute. He said the mural was a great deal of fun to work on. It is the largest piece he has ever done, and he thinks it will make quite an impact. “This is exciting for Lansing,” he noted enthusiastically.

The enormous art work is sure to be a conversation piece. Brennan said one of the goals is for the painting to serve as a reminder of “the continuum of the law.” What the students study at Cooley, he said “is a body of law that has been accumulating over the years... The wisdom of the past should be kept and built on.” ■