Dissemination of Intelligence (or, Distribution of News)

The first of the panels to be carved, Dissemination of Intelligence, is also the most allegorical. The seated figure on the left symbolizes Intelligence; the small figure of a Greek runner stands before her. Other figures variously hold out to Intelligence a boat, a locomotive, and an airplane, all representing travel; two more hold objects symbolizing the telegraph (lightning bolts) and radio (a microphone). George Jaslyn’s own considerable professional contribution to the spread of intelligence through newspaper journalism was reserved for the other panel on the east facade, a focus that may have influenced Alexander in his final preference of the more general title Dissemination of Intelligence over the original and more specific Distribution of News.

The Pioneer Press (or, The First Printer)

Brin had originally outlined a composition featuring Gutenberg, but readily accepted Alexander’s suggestion that an American treatment would be most appropriate here. The change was one of costume rather than composition, and in final design features a variety of frontier types – city fathers, women, a soldier – looking at a printer holding up a newspaper in front of his press. A somewhat exhausted-looking kneeling figure in the center symbolizes the Genius of the Press. The last change that Brin made was to convert the figure on the far left from a tunic-clad immigrant (perhaps a reference to his own life) to that of a Native American wearing buckskins.
The Homesteaders

Progress on this panel illustrates the perils inherent in collaboration at long distance and might be called "the non-dissemination of intelligence." Not included in Brin's original listing, The Homesteaders was suggested by Alexander as a companion piece for Civic Builders and a replacement for Lewis and Clark or Louisiana Purchase. Authorized to start work on Homesteaders, Brin worked out a design which Alexander found acceptable. Unfortunately, by this time Alexander had begun to have second thoughts about his own scheme and wrote to Alan McDonald suggesting that the Pony Express (the subject of one of Brin's two rejected equestrian pieces) would go well with Dissemination of Intelligence. McDonald conveyed this to Brin, who replied that Homesteaders was more than half completed. Though irritated that Brin was essentially forcing them to stay with their own idea, McDonald asked Alexander to accept the panel on the grounds that it would expedite carving on-site. Alexander concurred.

The Homesteaders depicts a stern group of established farmers, planted corn at their feet, staring at a group of equally determined-looking settlers. The kneeling Native American, Alexander said, "expresses surrender of the old way of life." Between the groups, prairie schooners travel a road winding into the distance. Alexander felt that a sun would enliven the middle section, but Brin demurred and McDonald wrote in agreement that "after seeing the Dissemination panel actually carved on the walls we do not feel that the space . . . will be objectionable. The scale of this building is so great . . . that these rather blank spaces on the panels do not seem nearly so blank on the wall."

Civic Builders

Complementing The Homesteaders, its counterpart on the north wall, Civic Builders, completes the story of George Joslyn embodied in the panels on the
east facade. *Civic Builders* describes the stage of progress after
*The Homesteaders* and shows two groups of purposeful men: planners
and entrepreneurs on one side, artisans and craftsmen on the
other. Between them rises a cityscape. Because of the significance
of this panel - it described the very act of civic building represented
by the erection of the Joslyn Memorial itself - Alexander was
especially anxious about its composition and made a number of
suggestions concerning the way the city was represented. In the
end Alexander declared the panel to be satisfactory rather than
exciting, commenting, "My objection being only that it lacks lift."

**Indian Signal Fire**

*Peace Pipe* was another of Brin's
original proposals, and his initial
attempts to transfer the design,
more-or-less wholesale, over to
Alexander's *Indian Signal Fire* led
to a lengthy exposition by the folk-
lore academic to the folk art-admiring
artist. "There is no 'peace pipe ceremony'
in the strict sense - the ritual smoking
of a pipe opens all councils." Further, the thunderbird that Brin
had depicted in the smoke was at cross-purposes with the peace
pipe ritual. "The Thunderbird would be fine in the smoke as it is a
frequent war emblem. I should have told you all these things, but
somehow it did not occur to me that they would not be familiar." As usual, Brin had taken an essentially narrative approach. In
his mind the scene captured the moment that "the Indians . . . are
pictured at . . . their first sight of the fire. Most of them are in a
meditative mood. . . . They do not hold fighting implements because
they just got the signal." But, bowing to Alexander's superior
knowledge and incorporating detailed information about costume,
Brin swiftly evolved a design depicting a war dance ceremony
with three horsemen (the reason for the signal fire and the war
preparations) in the distance. The final composition of *Indian
Signal Fire* neatly matched that of *Homesteaders* at the other end
of the north wall.
Indian Prayer for Life

Of all the panels, Indian Prayer for Life stems entirely from Alexander's special knowledge of Native American culture, and none of Brein's initial designs could be used as a starting point. The scene, he insisted, should show the "beautiful Hako Blessing the Child ritual, which was the Indian's prayer for the future of the race." Alexander, convinced that the panel was a necessary complement to the forward-looking spirit of Civic Builders, overcame Alan McDonald's reservations about its relevance. Once again, Brein's initial attempt to interpret Alexander's ideas met with detailed criticism. The long-suffering artist learned that his composition was "decidedly the least 'Indian' of any in this series. This is mainly due to the attitudes of the figures... Except in a Christian church I have never seen Indians kneel in devotion... It would be wrong, too, to put eagle-plume headdresses... [it] is a war symbol, and would never be worn... near the child who is a symbol of life, not death... I am wondering if you may not care to attempt another composition for the same subject." Brein patiently incorporated all of Alexander's suggestions into the next design, and the final relief depicts a child at the center of a ceremony. Surrounded by "acolytes" with the "Kurahus in profile, uplifting the winged stems, ... the old man... just lifting the blanket from the boy."

Indian Picture Writing

Alexander outlined to Brein his image of the design as "a painted tipi, with before it a woman working with a beading frame and a man painting a dressed skin [buffalo hide stretched on a frame]... Spectators or children could be added, at option. ... A second possibility could be a 'record keeper,' with a pile of painted skins before him... chanting the tribal history to seated auditors." Brein took the first option and depicted a group of figures on the left who "may be anything and everything" watching a man kneeling before a stretched skin to write. Alexander was adamant that an
unprepared hide be included to associate the act of writing with that of sign language. Reworking a buffalo skin motif from his design for the discarded fur traders panel, Brdin placed it in the center of the composition and pronounced it "as fine as any I have done so far."

Indian Sign Language

Brdin’s original scheme included a panel titled Buffalo Hunt, the design of which Alexander applauded as "the high point in the panel design . . . quite corking." So enthusiastic was he that, when the subject was eliminated at his own suggestion, he went along with Brdin’s request that he try to rework the design for Indian Sign Language. It was a stretch, but Alexander eventually came up with the expedient of having the figures on the right crook their hands at the sides of their heads – the sign for buffalo. Alexander also suggested that the silhouettes of both buffalo and archer be repeated, thereby suggesting a herd of animals and a phalanx of hunters. Finally, cautioning Brdin that the bowls he had included in the original sketch were not characteristic of Plains Indians, he suggested that the artist visit the Field Museum to study so that appropriate vessels be depicted.