

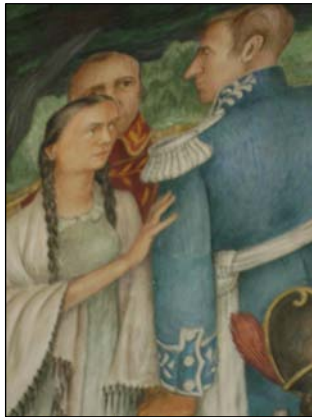
Historical figures are found in the artwork. The left side of the mural depicts the founding of the Presidio with the Ohlone Indians prominently featured. The Ohlones



were the peaceful native peoples of the Presidio.

In the upper left we see Maria de la Concepcion Marcela Arguello, born in the Presidio in 1791 and betrothed at the age of 15 to Russian Chamberlain Nikolai Rezanov. Her father, Presidio Comman-

dante Don Jose Arguello, stands behind her. Hers is a story of romance and tragedy, as Nikolai died riding horseback across Siberia to obtain royal and ecclesiastical permission for their marriage.



A locket he wore was eventually returned to Concepcion, proving he died loving her. She was the first native daughter to become a nun, entering the Dominican Order of Nuns in 1851. She died in 1857 and was buried Christmas Eve at St. Catherine Convent in Benicia, on the shores of San Francisco Bay.

To the right of St. Francis, the Army is shown developing radio communications and aviation, fighting forest fires, and designing large projects through the Army Corps of Engineers.

Planning the locks at the Panama Canal is depicted in the background of the detail below, while the officer's face in the foreground shows displeasure with the Golden Gate Bridge design, as it calls for the removal of Ft. Point. The bridge was built three years after the mural was painted with a



sturdy arch over Ft. Point, saving the historic fort and its stories for many generations to come.

The Chapel is available for weddings, family and office gatherings, concerts, retreats, and other events. Maintained through volunteer efforts, donations, and Chapel use fees, we invite your participation. Call for a tour. Check our website for current events. Sign up for monthly notices. The website details the Interfaith Center's programs and opportunities.

MAIN POST CHAPEL PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO

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PRESIDIO MURAL

PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO

*A National Treasure
located in the
Main Post Chapel*



A 34-foot mural adorns the east wall of the Chapel, facing the garden and city beyond. It depicts early Presidio history, with the Ohlone Indians in prominence, and the peacetime activities of the Army. St. Francis stands at its center with eucalyptus trees surrounding and the City of San Francisco beyond.

Presidio Chapel fresco artist Victor Mickhail Arnautoff was born in the Ukraine in 1896. He served as Cavalry officer in Czar Nicholas II's army, received the Cross of the Order of St. George for



valor, and escaped to Manchuria to avoid the Bolshevik Revolution. Once in San Francisco, Arnautoff was appointed technical

director of the Coit Tower murals, a project of the Works Progress Administration. The murals were completed in late 1934 and in December of that year, Arnautoff was appointed to do a fresco for the east wall of the Chapel under the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA). A *San Francisco Examiner* article reports:

"The design will measure approximately 13 feet by 34 feet," Arnautoff informed me. "In the central panel, which will be devoted to religion, will be the figure of St. Francis surrounded by trees. On the left side will be depicted the early history of California; on the right, the Army today occupied in the development of science, the radio, Army engineers examining the project of the Golden Gate Bridge, and approving the construction."



Arnautoff is a product of the California School of Fine Arts. His foundation in fresco painting he learned from Ray Boynton. Then he went to Mexico where there are large spaces to paint and studied under Diego Rivera. This was before Rivera left his footprints, metaphorically speaking, in San Francisco.



"When Rivera came to San Francisco," Arnautoff added, "he left me in charge of the wall decoration in the National Palace. I also worked with him in the Palace of Cortez at Cuernavaca. With practical experience, under his guidance, I became familiar with the chemical composition of plaster and the principles of mural painting." (*San Francisco Examiner*, December 30, 1934)

Artists assisting Arnautoff included Suzanne Scheuer, B. Cunningham, Edward Terada, Richard Ayer, M. Hardy, P. Hall, P. Vinson, G. Serrano, M. Cohen, P. Zoloth, T. Mead, and W. Mannex as plaster. It took only 42 days in early 1935 to complete.



The mural was sponsored by the officers of the 30th U.S. Infantry, according to the State Relief Administration *Review of Activities 1933-35*, where it is listed as Project Number 2-F3-100 - public works of art.

The public and the press were delighted with the mural. A June 23, 1935, *Examiner* article reports, "Arnautoff has done admirable work. His design is sound both in detail and in the large. His decoration is bright, interesting, appropriate. The fresco is ideally located. It is easily visible from end to end. It looks over a vista of Presidio and bay. People will be visiting it for many a day."

Research by Eve Iverson; photos by Jan Chaffee; text by both. There is a sketch of the mural by Arnautoff at the Archives of American Art, San Francisco DeYoung Museum, *S.F. Examiner*, December 30, 1934, p. 8E, Roll 3430, Frame 452.



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