

Rohrbeck, Franz, b. 12-23-1852 Torgau, Province of Saxony, Prussia, d. 1-5-1919 in Milwaukee. Rohrbeck began his career in Berlin, where he specialized in portraits and genre studies. He was married in Milwaukee on May 22, 1886, reportedly after having met his bride on the passage from Europe. While painting panoramas in Milwaukee he worked as a figure painter and specialized in the Confederate troops in battle scenes. He later remained in Milwaukee and continued to do panorama work when the opportunity presented itself, but worked chiefly as a decorative painter for churches, courthouses, and private residences. For the 1893 Chicago World's Fair he executed several large paintings depicting episodes from the life of Christopher Columbus. He created large religious murals for churches at such places as St. Cloud, Minnesota, Davenport, Iowa, and Calumet, Michigan. The Brown County Courthouse at Green Bay, Wisconsin provides a good example of Rohrbeck's work as a muralist. For this edifice in beaux arts style, constructed in 1908, Rohrbeck provided several murals depicting scenes from Wisconsin history, such as the early explorations of the region by Jean Nicolet and Father Claude Allouez. Inside the courthouse dome are four impressive panels depicting Justice, Agriculture, Commerce and Industry. All of these murals are still in existence. Of particular interest is a painting done in 1911 for the new Grays Harbor County Courthouse in Montesano, Washington. The painting, measuring nine by eleven feet was done in Milwaukee and was then glued to the plaster wall in a hallway on the second floor of the building. The painting depicts a history treaty with the Indians which was concluded at Cosmopolis, Washington in 1855. The territorial governor, Isaac Stevens, stands at the left facing an Indian chief. The historic details are not fully accurate, the chief appeared in a war bonnet of the type worn by the plains tribes and unknown among the Indians of Washington state. In 1986 the work was completely restored by a team of three specialists from Seattle. The picture has even been reproduced as an outdoor wall painting at Cosmopolis, Washington.
