



Taft, Lorado

American, 1860-1936

Alma Mater

Bronze and Granite, 1929

Gift of the Muskegon Community in honor of Charles Hackley, 1929

Collection of the Public Schools of the City of Muskegon

Loredo Taft was chosen in November, 1927, by the Board of Education of Public Schools of the City of Muskegon as the artist to create a visible tribute to one of Muskegon's most important citizens, Charles Hackley, whose 20 years of leadership on the Board of Education, including serving as President at the time of his death, and his multiple important gifts to the District and to the City still have impact even yet today. In December of 1928, the District hosted a public fundraiser which netted over \$60,000 to pay for what would become the *Alma Mater*, which was unveiled October 21, 1929. This sculpture is located on the campus of Muskegon High School, and was most recently conserved in 2002.

Alma Mater represents Athena, the goddess of education, who is sheltering the spark of learning with her left hand and holding forth the torch of knowledge with her right hand. Below the 11-foot bronze sculpture is a profile portrait of Charles Hackley and flanking that are reliefs of the *Good Samaritan* and *Mercury*. The former symbolizes Hackley's philanthropy while the latter as the god of commerce represents his business interest.

Loredo Taft was born in Elmwood, Illinois. His father was a professor of geology at the Illinois Industrial University (later renamed the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). After being homeschooled by his parents, Taft earned his bachelor's degree (1879) and master's degree (1880) at Illinois Industrial University.

After his master's degree, he left for Paris to study sculpture, attending the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts from 1880 to 1883, where he studied with Augustin Dumont, Jean-Marie Bonnassieux and Jules Thomas. His record there was outstanding; he was cited as "top man" in his studio and twice exhibited at the Salon.

Though widely known and heralded as a sculptor in his lifetime, Taft is better known today as the first important historian of American sculpture. Taft worked in the Academic tradition, most closely associated with the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in France, which stressed the production of large-scale symbolic works. The Archives of American Art lists only three examples of Taft's work in Michigan with the *Alma Mater* being the most important and most representative of his style.