

Report on Damage to Overmyer Murals in the Kansas Statehouse

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Overview

In 1953, David H. Overmyer completed a series of murals as part of the decorative scheme of the Kansas Statehouse. Located in the first floor rotunda, the murals depict eight scenes from Kansas history. They are painted directly on the plaster walls. Each mural measures 135" in height by 84" in width.

From 2001 to 2014, the Statehouse underwent extensive renovation. This included repairs to the infrastructure, as well as the addition of office space, a visitors' center, and an underground parking garage. Though past wall treatments were discovered and restored during the renovation, the murals decorating the main areas of the building were not restored.

Historical society staff recently noticed that some of the Overmyer murals show damage, mainly cracks in the plaster that have resulted in the top layer flaking off in small areas. The following report contains descriptions of the damage to each mural. Photographs of the murals showing the most damage will be shared via Dropbox.

Description of Damage

Battle of Mine Creek

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: Plaster on the bottom one-third of the mural shows a web of fine cracks and flaking of the painted surface. The upper two-thirds of the painting appear intact, with little to no cracks and no flaking. There is a roughly 1" x 1" area of loss in the lower left quadrant. The lower right quadrant shows a ½" x ½" area of loss, as well as two smaller areas of loss (a total of three areas of loss in the lower right). There are multiple very small areas (approximately ¼" x ¼") of loss at the bottom center. There are many areas across the lower portion of the mural where the painted layer of the plaster seems to be barely holding onto the wall.

Battle of Arikaree

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: There is a network of fine cracks over the bottom quarter of the mural and a ¼" x ¼" area of loss near the bottom center. The remainder of the mural appears to be intact, with little to no cracking over the top three-quarters of the mural.

Coming of the Spaniards

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: There is minimal cracking over the lower quarter of the mural but no areas of loss. There are multiple places over the cracked area where the edges of the painted surfaced are lifted and curled.

Chisholm Trail

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: There is no apparent damage to this mural. There are no areas of cracking, flaking, or loss.

Arrival of the Railroads

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: There is some cracking in the lower left quadrant, though it is not as extensive as that found in other murals in the rotunda. No curling, flaking, or loss of the painted layer.

Westward Ho

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: There is light cracking over the lower one-quarter of the mural. There are no areas of curling, flaking, or loss.

Lewis & Clark in Kansas

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: There is no apparent damage to this mural. The plaster is intact.

Building a Sod House

Dimensions: 135" x 84"

Damage: There is no apparent damage to this mural. The plaster is intact.

General Observations

The murals that show the most damage are located in the southeast and northeast areas of the rotunda. The murals located on the western half show very little to no damage.

Light levels are probably on the high side. All of the light is artificial; there are no sources of natural light at this level of the rotunda.

This is a high traffic area, even on days when the legislature is not in session. Due to roughly five feet of marble wainscoting along the bottom of the wall, the lower portions of the murals are basically at eye level for the average visitor. The murals are blocked off with stanchions.

There is an air shaft / stairwell in the northeast corner of the rotunda. Windows that open into the shaft are left open and there is a good draft of air that comes into the rotunda from the air shaft / stairwell. The

murals with the most damage are located adjacent to the airshaft / stairwell. The following illustration shows the layout of the murals in relation to the stairwell/airshaft and doorways.

