

The Subjects from Senate District 36 of The State of Kansas Historical Mural

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Proudly showcased on the 2nd floor of the Kansas State Capitol Building, in the Lieutenant Governor's Press Room, hangs *The State of Kansas Historical Mural*. This mural, composed of ten separate panels that cover the entire east wall of the press room, showcases over 300 important subjects of Kansas juxtaposed on top of a map of the state. These artifacts include famous Kansans, natural wonders, state symbols, historical sites, architectural works, and prominent pieces of art. The mural also includes numerous towns and cities, rivers, lakes, aquifers, and reservoirs.

Starting in 2009, artist Dennis Schiel of Hays, KS, set out on a journey that included 447 hours of library research, 2,652 hours of painting, and over 73,000 miles of travel before its conclusion in 2013. In a personal correspondence on June 12th, 2020, Mr. Schiel stated, "I put on the mural what I wanted to put on there, what I felt was important. Kansas has a ton of history." Schiel started on the Hays panel before expanding to the rest of the state. When asked about what one of his favorite aspects of this project was, he replied, "Getting to meet so many interesting people, and getting to see such unique scenery from across the state." Since Kansas has over 82,000 square miles of land, that allows for a truly unique and diverse experience.

While *The State of Kansas Historical Mural* covers the entire Sunflower State, the focus of this article will be to highlight the subjects of the mural that lie within Kansas State Senate District 36. This district is in north-central Kansas, is composed of 13 counties, 82 cities, and over 71,000 residents. Being that District 36 is the second-largest district, covering over 10,500 square miles, three of the ten panels from the mural contain subjects that fall within Kansas Senate District 36 (elainebowers.com, 2020). Just like the state, this district is full of unique

history and interesting people. The sections below give a brief synopsis of all the subjects represented on the mural that fall within the boundaries of Senate District 36.

Subjects from Cloud County

The Brown Grand Theater

Lying in the heart of Concordia, KS, stands a piece of architectural beauty and historical significance: The Brown Grand Theater. In 1905, a wealthy Concordian by the name of Colonel Napoleon Bonaparte Brown announced that he was going to construct a fully outfitted opera house for the City of Concordia. Under the direction of Colonel Brown's son, Earl Van Dom Brown, and under the supervision of native Concordian W.T. Short, construction began on April 3rd, 1906. The Browns really wanted to stress the use of local resources such as limestone from the local quarry and locally-fired bricks. Once completed in 1907, the Brown Grand Theatre stood erect at 60 feet high and spanned 120 feet long. The \$40,000 building was Renaissance in style, and soon became a crowning symbol for the local community (Sutton, n.d.).

After going through numerous renovations throughout the years, The Brown Grand Theater is open for tours, various live shows, and can even be rented out for events. For over 100 years, this theater has been a symbol for the community. It is a testament to the history and importance theatre has not only in District 36, but Kansas as a whole.

Frank Carlson

Frank Carlson was a towering figure in Kansas politics. Carlson was a native farmer in Concordia, KS, when he was approached by four businessmen encouraging him to run for the Kansas House of Representatives in 1928. After serving two terms in the Kansas House, he decided to run for the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1946, Carlson ran for Governor of Kansas, winning a second term in 1948. However, Carlson wasn't done. When his tenure as

Governor was over, Carlson ran for U.S. Senate, remaining there for 18 years. In total, Carlson spent 34 years in public service to his state and to his country (Kansas Historical Society, 2016).

During his time as governor, Carlson worked hard to improve rural Kansas hospitals and the state's highway systems. One of Carlson's most notable achievements involves his work that resulted in dramatic improvements in Kansas' mental health hospitals. Prior to Carlson's administration, Kansas ranked number 40 in terms of the condition of its mental health facilities. By 1950, Kansas had jumped up to 11th place. While in the Senate, Carlson fought against many of FDR's New Deal programs while throwing support behind President Johnson's civil rights legislation (Kansas Historical Society, 2016). Senator Frank Carlson was a public servant who created dramatic and impressive change for Kansas and for the United States.

Orphan Train Wall Mural

Another historical mural subject that lies in the City of Concordia is the longest sculpted brick mural in the United States, also known as *The Orphan Train Wall Mural*. This mural is located on the west wall of the Cloud County Museum/Visitor's Center. It is composed of 6,400 bricks and is 140 feet long. Completed in 2008, this mural showcases the history of Cloud County, with the orphan train being the focal point (Morrison, 2019).

As American immigration boomed in the middle 1800s, poor urban sanitation combined with poor working conditions, resulted in many young mothers dying. As orphanages were built in cities along the east coast, they quickly began to fill up. Cities could no longer provide for the overflowing number of orphans. As a result, orphan trains were set up to help find these children families from other parts of the country (National Orphan Train Complex Museum & Research Center, 2017).

Prisoner of War Camp

Two miles north and one mile east of Concordia rests a piece of World War II History, POW Camp Concordia. From May 1st, 1943 to November 8th, 1945, this camp held over 4,000 German POWs. When the camp was originally built, it had over 300 buildings including restaurants, a hospital, fire department, a post, and barracks. The total cost to build the camp came in at \$1,808,806. During its usage, the camp saw only two escapees and 8 deaths (POW Camp Concordia Museum, n.d.).

While the camp no longer houses prisoners of war, a museum opened up in 2015 to tell the camp's story. For individuals who want to tour the museum, they can set up an appointment to visit. "Visitors will see pictorial exhibits of camp activity, read compelling stories of Army personnel stationed at Camp Concordia, as well as stories of German POWs whose memories of their incarceration were ironically positive" (POW Camp Concordia Museum, n.d.).

Sisters of St. Joseph Nazareth Motherhouse

Arguably one of the most beautiful buildings in Concordia is the Nazareth Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Construction on this five-story, red-brick wonder began in 1902, with the growing congregation moving into the house (also known as the Nazareth Convent and Academy) just 13 months later. Today, it continues to serve as the spiritual home for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia. The Motherhouse also serves as an integral part of Concordia as it frequently works with schools, senior centers, nursing facilities, and members of the community (Nazareth Convent & Academy, 2011).

Subjects from Lincoln County

Post Rock Capital of America

In the heart of Lincoln county lies the post rock capital of the U.S. During the early days of settling the new Kansas frontier, there were very few trees for the early homesteaders to use to mark their property. As a result, north-central Kansas settlers would quarry limestone posts, place them on the edges of their fields, and string barbed wire between the posts to mark their property. Along with the fence posts, Lincoln County is filled with barns, churches, courthouses, businesses, bridges, and homes constructed of fence-post limestone. “Post rock country is about 200 miles long, stretching diagonally southwest from near the Nebraska border in Washington County to just north of Dodge City in Ford County. East to west, it ranges from less than 10 miles to nearly 60 miles wide” (Kansas Geological Survey, n.d.).

Subjects from Mitchell County

World’s Largest Ball of Twine

One of the more fun world records that Kansas is home to would be the world’s largest ball of twine, located in Cawker City. In 1953, farmer Frank Stoeber reportedly was tired of all the old twine on his barn floor. Instead of sweeping it up and burning it, Frank rolled it up into a big ball. As the ball got bigger and bigger, Frank’s friends and neighbors would bring their twine to add to the ball. In 1961, the ball got so large that Frank decided to show it off in the Cawker City Centennial Parade. It became so popular that it was placed on a concrete slab a year later. Frank kept adding twine until he could no longer do it. In 1973, the Guinness World Records certified Frank’s ball as the World’s Largest. To this day, visitors frequently add more twine to the ever-growing behemoth. It is estimated that the ball weighs over 13 tons and contains over 1,600 miles of twine (Kirby, Smith, & Wilkens, n.d.).

Subjects from Osborne County

Geodetic Center of North America

While satellites and GPS are the tools used to map and determine locations today, more primitive, yet still vital, tools were used in the past. Enter the Geodetic Center of North America. The geodetic center is a little different than the geographic center. The geodetic center takes into account the curvature of the earth, making it more accurate. In the early 20th century, surveyors began to plot and map out parts of the United States, Mexico, and Canada. However, overlaps and gaps would occur. As a result, a more accurate measure was needed. Thus, in 1913 the geodetic center was placed and mapped. It lies near the intersection of two transcontinental arcs of triangulation, which are features used by surveyors. To this day, the geodetic center remains the most accurate reference point. It is even still used by some government agencies (Atlas Obscura, 2019).

Osborne Oil Fields

Another Osborne County find that is on the historical mural is the Osborne Oil Fields. Oil is an important aspect to the Kansas economy. “Kansas holds nearly 1% of U.S. provided crude oil reserves, and it accounts for about 1% of the nation's total oil production” (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2020). However, Kansas does not just produce oil, the Sunflower State refines it as well. With three oil refineries producing roughly 394,000 barrels a day, Kansas makes up approximately 2% of the nation’s oil refining capacity (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2020). With Kansas’ important role in oil production in mind, it is not hard to see why the Osborne Oil Fields have a place on *The State of Kansas Historical Mural*.

Subjects from Ottawa County

Rock City Park

When it comes to natural wonders, Kansas does not hold back. 3.5 miles south of Minneapolis is Rock City Park. Rock City Park is a five-acre park consisting of about 200 large Dakota sandstone concretions. The largest of these rocks can reach up to 27 feet in diameter (Stokes, n.d.). They make the perfect jungle gym for kids (and adults) to climb on. For over 100 years, Rock City Park has provided a space for families and friends to enjoy the wide openness of the Kansas plains!

Subjects from Republic County

Pawnee Indian Tribe, Pawnee Indian Museum State Historical Site

Kansas has a long and deep history of Native American culture. One of the most powerful and influential tribes in Kansas were the Pawnee. They had a large territory going up through northcentral Kansas into Nebraska, with large hunting plains extending to the west. It is believed that they have inhabited the region for the past one thousand years. In the early 19th century, there were as many as 20,000 Pawnee (Kansas Historical Society, 2020).

They lived in large dome-shaped earth lodges, measuring 25 to 60 feet in diameter. Extended families of 30 to 50 people would live in these huts. As western expansion grew, squirmishes erupted between settlers and the Pawnee. Tribal delegations went to Washington D.C. multiple times throughout the 1800s in order to negotiate land. However, their land became smaller with each round of negotiations. In 1875, they ceded their lands in Kansas and relocated to what is now Pawnee County, Oklahoma. By 1900, their numbers had been dramatically reduced to 600. Today, more than 3,000 members compose the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, a federally recognized government (Kansas Historical Society, 2020).

Subjects from Rooks County

Waller-Coolbaugh 20th Century House

For those looking for early 1900s class and sophistication, they need not look much further than the Waller-Coolbaugh 20th Century House in Stockton, Kansas. Said house was constructed in 1905 by the organizer of the Stockton State Bank, businessman M. J. Coolbaugh. At a cost of \$9,000, the white two-story house features “solid oak trim throughout, beginning with the front entrance made of richly carved massive oak doors at each side of the vestibule. A handsome staircase leads to the floor above. Also featured in the home are several ornate fireplaces, antique radiators and unusual nooks” (Kansas Sampler Foundation, 2013).

Subjects from Russell County

Bob Dole

When thinking of the mightiest figures in Kansas history, it is hard to not think about retired U.S. Senator Bob Dole. Robert Joseph “Bob” Dole was born in Russell, KS, on July 22, 1923. As a young man, Dole enlisted into the United States Army in 1942. During active combat in 1944 in Italy, he was severely injured by gunfire. As a result, he suffered from paralysis from the neckdown. However, after numerous surgeries and grueling rehabilitation, Dole was able to recover far better than anybody had expected. The only lingering effects are the paralysis of his right arm and hand (Biography.com Editors, 2020).

After his military service, Dole went to law school at Washburn University in Topeka. After about a year in college, he was urged to run for the Kansas state legislature. He ran and won. In 1952, Dole began practicing law in Russell. Then, in 1961, Dole ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. He served in the House until 1969 when he decided to run for and win a seat in the United States Senate, representing the Sunflower State. During his time in

the Senate, Dole served as chairs on numerous committees and even eventually earned the rank of Majority Leader (Biography.com Editors, 2020).

In 1976, President Gerald Ford selected Senator Dole to serve as his running mate for the upcoming election. However, President Ford lost to Democrat Jimmy Carter in November of 1976. However, that was not Dole's last shot at the White House. In 1996, he won the Republican primary for the Presidential Election. Yet, Dole lost to President Bill Clinton. After his failed Presidential bid, former Senator Dole returned to practicing law. Today, he continues to support Kansas through political activism, speaking engagements, and philanthropic endeavors (Biography.com Editors, 2020).

The Garden of Eden

While some might say that art is reserved for urban and metropolitan areas, The Garden of Eden in Lucas, KS, would disagree. With a population less than 500 people, Lucas was granted the title "Grassroots Art Capital of Kansas" in 1996 by Governor Bill Graves. The Garden of Eden, built by Civil War Veteran and Populist politician Samuel Perry Dinsmoor in 1907, consists of a unique limestone cabin with various sculptures also existing on the property. The cabin contains unique and ornate furniture built by Dinsmoor himself. On the exterior, visitors can admire over 150 different concrete sculptures of figures such as children, angels, insects, political messages, trees, and an American flag. Over 113 tons of concrete was used to create these eccentric sculptures. Folks of all ages are invited to visit The Garden of Eden, which is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and to enjoy Dinsmoor's works (Legends of America, n.d.).

Subjects from Smith County

Geographic Center of the 48 Contiguous States

Some consider Kansas to be a “fly-over state.” However, the Sunflower State is the center of this nation, literally. As of today, the geographic center of the 48 contiguous states rests approximately two miles northwest of Lebanon, KS. If someone were to travel to this location, he/she would find a stone monument with a flagpole. On the monument is a metal plaque giving a brief history of the site. Visitors can also sign the guestbook and leave notes for future visitors. They can also take a moment to step inside the U.S. Geographical Center Chapel, a very small building containing eight single-seat pews and a pulpit (Stokes, n.d.).

“Home on the Range” Cabin

Few words will invoke as much pride and passion in a Kansan’s heart than, “Oh give me a home, where the buffalo roam, where the deer and the antelope play. Seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day.” The official song for the State of Kansas, “Home on the Range”, was originally written as the poem “My Western Home” by Dr. Brewster M. Higley on his Kansas homestead in 1871. He wrote the poem to describe the natural beauty and awe of his homestead. In July of 1872, Dr. Higley constructed a small cabin on his homestead which still stands to this day on the bank of the West Beaver Creek in Smith County (The Peoples Heartland Foundation, n.d.).

The poem was presented to singer Dan Kelly, who turned the poem into a song. Later, it was performed by the Harlan Brothers Orchestra. The song began to spread across the nation with its popularity skyrocketing after President Franklin D. Roosevelt told reporters that “Home on the Range” was his favorite song. Soon, popular singers began to make their own renditions. Claims of the original author of the song were unclear and disputed until it was proven in 1935

that the original author was Dr. Higley. In 1947, “Home on the Range” became the official state song of Kansas (Library of Congress, n.d.).

The Old Dutch Mill

Between the years of 1879 and 1882, German immigrant Charles G. Schwarz constructed a mill on the north side of Reamsville, KS. Today, this mill is referred to as the “Old Dutch Mill.” It served as a vital tool for grinding wheat, corn, and other grains. The mill’s blades were originally covered in cloth and were the power source of the mill until 1914 when a kerosene engine was installed. The Old Dutch Mill ran until 1920. On February 3rd, 1938, the mill was relocated to the city of Smith Center. After a fire destroyed most of the mill in 1955, a renovation effort raised \$2,700 to repair the old mill. Today, visitors can tour the inside of the building as well as rent the space out for gatherings and celebrations (Goedert, 2017).

Subjects from Marshall County*

*Kansas’ 36th Senate District does not encompass the entirety of Marshall County. The district is composed of the Townships of Blue Rapids, Blue Rapids City, Cottage Hill, Elm Creek, Herkimer, Logan, Marysville, Oketo, Walnut, and Waterville.

Alcove Spring Historic Park

Alcove Spring Historic Park near Blue Rapids, KS, is a true marvel to look at. This park has significant and historic ties to the Oregon Trail. Alcove Spring was first discovered in 1846 by the Donnor-Reed Party when they were delayed by high waters of Blue River. “The spring flows from the side of the alcove into the basin below the falls. Water from a wet-weather creek flows over a rocky outcrop and falls 10-12 feet into the same pool” (Marysville Convention & Tourism, 2019).

This park is listed on the National Registrar of Historic Places. While it is currently open to the public, the park did not have public access status from the 1970s until 1993. The Alcove Spring Preservation Association currently hosts events at the site and works to preserve it along

with the Kansas State Historical Society and the National Park Service. Visitors can view the natural beauty of wildflowers, native grasses, trees, birds and other wildlife while they hike through the area (Marysville Convention & Tourism, 2019).

Peggy Hull

Kansas has been home to important moments for women's rights and empowerment. Therefore, it is no surprise that the first female war correspondent accredited by the United States War Department was from the Sunflower State. Born on December 30th, 1889, near Bennington, KS, Henrietta Eleanor Goodnough (Peggy Hull) was raised in Marysville and later moved to Junction City. While there, she became a reporter for the *Junction City Daily Sentinel*. She reported in several states before requesting to be sent to France to cover The World War. Since her editor had a connection with General John J. Pershing, she was allowed to report even though the War Department had not accredited her. However, she soon got her accreditation and covered American conflict from World War I into World War II. After World War II, she moved to California where she lived until her death on June 19th, 1967 (Tarr, 2016).

Pony Express Home Station No. 1

While Americans today utilize planes, trains, and automobiles to deliver their mail, Americans on the Western Frontier in 1860 and 1861 primarily relied on the services of the Pony Express. Running from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California, the Pony Express was a vital tool for delivering mail quickly between the west coast and the Midwest. In the heart of Marysville, KS, sat Home Station No. 1. This station was built out of stone in 1859 by Joseph Cottrell, and was leased to the Pony Express in 1860. While the Pony Express operated the main building, Cottrell kept his blacksmith shop operational in the barn (Marysville Convention & Tourism, 2020).

Today, the building stands as a museum consisting of the original stable and an annex which was added in 1991. The museum has also expanded to include features of railroads and trails, emphasizing Marysville's importance to American transportation. "In June of each year, the National Pony Express Association sponsors a Pony Express Re-Ride from Sacramento, CA to St. Joseph, MO. Each year they alternate the direction of the re-ride, traveling East or West. More than 550 riders and horses are posted at intervals to take turns carrying the mail. Each rider takes an oath similar to the riders in 1860-1861 and is issued a Bible in the tradition of Russell, Majors and Waddell, the operators of the Pony Express" (Visitmarysville.org, 2020).

Conclusion

It is clear to see that Kansas Senate District 36 has played a vital role in the development of Kansas and of the United States. District 36 is full of history, art, politics, progress, and culture. Artist Dennis Schiel did a magnificent job representing the district in his work *The State of Kansas Historical Mural*. Residents of District 36 are tough, creative, humble, hard-working, and kind, down-to-earth folks. When there are those who say, "there's nothing in Kansas", all they need to do is merely look at the works of the people of Kansas Senate District 36 to see that statement simply is not true.

A quotation from P.S. Baber sums up perfectly the impact of this great state on its people, "You can never really escape. It goes with you, wherever you go. Somehow, the prairie dust gets in your blood, and it flows through your veins until it becomes a part of you. The vast stretches of empty fields, the flat horizons of treeless plains. The simplicity of the people—good, earnest people. The way they talk and the way they live. The lack of occurrence, lack of attention, lack of everything. All that—it's etched into your soul and it colors the way you see everything and it

becomes a part of you.” In a time where things are never simple, perhaps one should imitate the practice of the people of Kansas and look “to the stars through difficulty.”

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