

The “Centennial Mural” by James Duard Marshall is a 30-foot-wide by 7-foot-tall work painted on three panels of stretched canvas on wooden frames. The panels align horizontally and blend together when assembled. Each panel is its own tableau framed by two, tall, thin trees filled with green leaves. Each tree has a pair of figures around it – one on each side. The backdrop of the mural is the rolling Ozark hills behind dark green tree lines, golden fields, and light green pastures dotted with buildings in red, white, and brown. In the top left corner of the mural it shows the landing of Columbus on the east coast through the branches of the first panel’s left tree. Otherwise, the mural depicts the history of Neosho and Newton County from approximately 1839 to 1939.

Moving from left to right – around the panel’s left tree, in the foreground, are two Osage males with dark hair depicted wearing sky blue breech cloths and banded headdresses with single upright feathers. Both are looking down at the incoming settlers, the one on the left standing

with his right hand clenching a tree branch and in his left a bow. The other to his right sitting with his knees tucked into his chest, arms circled around his legs. The incoming settlers are shown arriving in a covered wagon drawn by oxen with a donkey loaded with supplies leading them. In the background is a log cabin built by settlers. Moving right the Granby mines are shown representing the first industrial development in the county. Moving toward the foreground we see Civil War conflict in front of the two story Masonic Hall. The figures in the foreground on the right are Civil War soldiers looking down at the conflict below. The figure on the left is a white Union soldier in a blue uniform crouching and holding his rifle up by his side as he hands a plug of tobacco to the older, white haired Confederate soldier who stands in his grey uniform holding his rifle to the side pointed up as well. A copperhead snake twists around the tree behind them, representing the conflict between them. In the background, headed right, is a steam engine train.

In the center panel, there is a woman on the left foreground in a maroon turn of the century top and skirt that falls to her ankle with a small bustle. She has her blond hair pinned up into her matching hat and a green sash around her neck and hips. Her front faces us, her head turned a quarter right. She has on long yellow gloves and poses her green parasol on the ground. Behind her is the front of the Armstrong House with a stage coach outside and the old red brick county courthouse with its distinguishing features of Second Empire Style architecture. Beside her is an older black man, George Washington Carver, who was born in Diamond, MO during the Civil War and attended school in Neosho. He sits crossed legged, the sole of his bare foot facing the front. He looks profile, a pipe in his hand – he's wearing brown pants and a long sleeved white shirt. On the ground beside him rests peanut plants. Behind him are a row of apple trees receding into the horizon, each is full of pink flowering blossoms and in front a man is seen threshing wheat. To the right is a blacksmith shop housed in a grey

barn. Next we see a brush arbor with a meeting occurring with figures seated watching two people on a platform, one at a podium, the other seated at a piano. In the background a horse-driven sorghum mill is shown. Beyond it stands the white, wood framed structure of the First Baptist Church. A grist mill is depicted in the foreground behind two figures on the very right of the panel.

The figure to the left is a young, white man in a grey, short brimmed hat with a black band, blue jeans, and a peach button shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He is on his knees sharpening a scythe and looking over his shoulder at the older man. The man is M.E. Benton, U.S. Representative and father of artist Thomas Hart Benton. He is wearing a black suit and white shirt with a book open in his hands.

In the third and final panel in the extreme left foreground is C.M. Shartel standing with his back to Benton. Shartel was Benton's successor as U.S. Representative from Missouri. He is shown with white hair standing in a dark suit, his face profile, and hand clutching a scroll of paper. In the

background stands the red brick Congregational Church.

Beside Shartel is a kneeling WWI Doughboy – soldier – in an olive green uniform, brown boots, and a rounded green helmet. He holds a rifle at his side pointed up and looks down at the city. In the sky above are dark storm clouds representing the turbulent years of the First World War.

In the center of the painting, we see many buildings in reds, browns, yellows, and whites. Businesses featured include the grain elevator at Neosho, the Tripoli works at Seneca, Neosho Canning Factory, the Haas wholesale building, the First Christian Church, and the Pet Milk Company. The Newton County Courthouse built in 1936 is shown to the right of the businesses. It is built of Carthage stone and is a four story Art Deco style construction. The establishment featured in the front is the Kansas City Southern depot as it was depicted in the film “Jesse James” where parts of the movie were filmed. The pair of figures on the right foreground gives representation to the modern boy and girl of 1939. On the right is a young child

in khaki shorts, a short sleeve yellow shirt, and a catcher's mitt – he is posed to catch a ball from someone we can't see off canvas. A teenage girl looks at us with a serious face. She has short brown hair, a blue short sleeved shirt, and a brown skirt that falls below her knee. She holds a tennis racket down by her side.

The community first asked Neosho native Thomas Hart Benton to paint the work for the upcoming Centennial Celebration, but Benton, who was unavailable, recommended his student from the Kansas City Art Institute James Duard Marshall. Marshall painted the mural inside the Hass building on the Neosho Square. It was displayed at the Centennial Celebration in September of 1939 before being moved to the Neosho Municipal Auditorium. In 2008, it was moved to the Neosho- Newton County Library. In 2022 the mural was transported to Kansas City for repair and restoration before being reinstalled the Neosho- Newton County Library.