



Frank L. Wertz II/Daily Gazette

Nancy Achberger of Milford uses a syringe to inject an adhesive behind an air pocket in the paint of this mural on the second floor of the Greene County Courthouse. Achberger and three other artists, including John Babcock who is in the background, are renovating the mural.

## Courthouse mural getting new look

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XENIA

At first, the idea of artists renovating the work of another painter is fascinating. But after a second, more-investigative glance, well, it's a whole other animal.

By the end of this week, the work on the mural on the second floor of the Greene County Courthouse should be complete.

The four painters who work for Wiebold Studios of Cincinnati will have put more than 150 hours into restoring the 97-year-old mural.

Two of them also spent five weeks renovating the paintings on the ceiling of the Court Room 1, which is undergoing a renovation project of its own.

"We're paint surgeons," said John Babcock of Cincinnati, "only we still make house calls."

"We are arresting the deterioration," said Nancy Achberger of Milford. "We're healing the painting."

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The biggest task in the entire project was the painting in the northeast corner of Court Room 1.

Susan Martin of Oxford said that the tornado of 1974 ripped off some of the roof in that area, and over the years the painting has sustained water damage.

Because the paint was completely chipped off in large sections, Martin said they had to redraw some of the artwork by hand using old photos.

To reach the paintings, the four

employ a 20-foot scaffold that sways with the slightest movement, something Martin said "you get used to after a while."

But the process they go through to restore a painting is unique.

First, an ordinary syringe is filled with a heat-activated adhesive. The adhesive is applied behind any air pockets that have formed in the paint and where there are cracks in the paint.

Heat is applied to the mural in a process that is like ironing. It not only flattens out the air pockets, but the paint is also glued to the wall.

After the mural is thoroughly clean, the painting is isolated with a varnish. Then the artists can replace the missing areas with the paint. They must match the painting's texture and colors.

"The varnish will allow (another restorer) to undo what we've done, if better technology comes along," said John Babcock of Cincinnati.

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# Mural

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"We do not want to do anything to (the painting) that will prevent future restoration," Babcock said, adding that the art of restoring paintings has been evolving over time and that sometimes something will be done to restore a work that prevents preservation at a later time.

All four have degrees in painting and do their own original work.

Achberger said that, by looking so intently at another artist's techniques and styles, it provide her with an opportunity to learn.

The difference in restoring another artist's work, Babcock said, is they are trying to "save another painter's intent. In that process... we get to walk in the

footsteps of other artists and that enriches our own."

While the artist of the mural on the ceiling of Court Room 1 is known to be John Archer of Schachne Studios in Dayton, there is a little mystery about the artist of the 20-foot-by-10-foot mural in the hallway.

An information plaque on the first floor of the courthouse said the painter was "an unknown artist from Cincinnati."

The mural, which is unsigned, was repaired in 1955 by Francis Clark Brown of West Milton.

There is another mural on the ceiling of Court Room 2; however, it is now covered by a reproduction copper ceiling. It was never restored.