



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

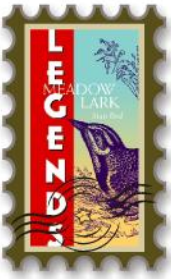
John Stuart Curry (1897-1946)

John Stuart Curry's Kansas roots inspired many of his notable artistic creations throughout his career. Curry crafted vivid images of farm life and natural disasters, some with religious and political undertones, using ink sketches, watercolors, oils and murals. Despite some of Curry's controversial work, he is considered one of the three great Regionalist painters of his time.



Born in Dunavant, Kan., John Stuart Curry grew up on a farm and earned an appreciation for both life on the farm and weather conditions affecting such life. He picked up a pencil and began sketching at an early age, drawing everything from revolvers to animal fights. After high school at the age of 19, Curry left the farm to study art, first at the Kansas City Art Institute and then at the Art Institute of Chicago before heading to New York. During this time, Curry earned a living illustrating books and magazines including Boys Life and The Saturday Evening Post.

In 1926, Curry left the country to expand his art knowledge and spent eight months studying in Paris. He returned to the United States to teach art at the Art Students League and Cooper Union in New York City. Eventually, Curry traveled with the Ringling Brothers circus, during which time he painted circus scenes and animals.



"Baptism in Kansas," a work painted by Curry in 1928, was purchased by the Whitney Museum in 1931, leading to national recognition of the Kansas painter. Curry soon met Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton, from Iowa and Missouri respectively, and the three friends would grow to establish a new style of art in the U.S. known as Regionalism.

In 1933, Curry created one of his most notable masterpieces, "Sanctuary." The piece depicts a group of farm animals escaping a flood on a tiny dry island amidst the waters, as based upon a disastrous flood of the Kaw River near Lawrence, Kan., in 1929. Curry would recreate this piece a number of times throughout his life. The painting's motif also reflected the nation's search for sanctuary from the Great Depression.

On the heels of such success, Curry was commissioned by a group of Kansas newspaper editors to paint murals in the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka. Curry had a unique vision for the murals, suggesting three distinct parts for the entire work: the history and settlement of Kansas, the days of homesteaders, and prosperity on the farm in a more modern-day Kansas.



After revealing the murals to the public, Curry's work drew a great deal of criticism. Some Kansans thought Curry's themes depicted Kansas in a negative light, focusing on such subjects such as abolitionist John Brown, tornadoes and other Kansas weather disasters, and religious motifs deemed fanatical. The stress of the controversy may have caused Curry's fatal heart attack in 1946 suffered at the young age of 48. In 1992, the state legislature finally passed a resolution recognizing the inappropriate treatment of one of Kansas' most respected artists. The artist never signed the Statehouse murals.

