

2018 GOVERNOR'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARDS

Santa Barbara County Courthouse Mural Room Conservation



The Santa Barbara County Courthouse, a prime example of Spanish Colonial Revival design, features a Mural Room where the history of Santa Barbara, including Sebastián Vizcaíno's founding expedition and the adaptation of American rule, are depicted on more than 4,100 square feet of painted canvas murals. The work of California artist Daniel Sayre Groesbeck, the murals depict the history of Santa Barbara from the Canolino Tribe that lived along the Santa Barbara Channel to the arrival of John C. Fremont and the adaptation of American rule.

Although cleaning took place following an electrical fire in 2010, the murals and many other decorative architectural elements were in need of significant conservation, restoration and repair. EverGreene Conservators began the restoration process in December 2014 first by documenting existing conditions, then by repairing damaged plaster and canvas, stabilizing cracking paint, and in-painting areas of loss and damage on the historic murals and the surrounding architectural elements. The project was completed in 2015.

The Daniel Groesbeck murals that adorn the four walls of the Mural Room were the primary focus of the conservation project, along with cleaning and stabilization of the decorative ceiling. The scope of work was expanded to include mitigation of water damage on the upper ceiling, as well as cleaning and restoration of the wood wainscoting, leather benches, and tile and wrought iron elements. Finally, through the expert services of a museum lighting designer, mural and ceiling lighting was added in such a way as to not impact the historic resources while providing better illumination of the conserved room.

Through the dedicated efforts of the entire team, the work was completed within a very tight 10-week schedule. During the course of the project, various fundraising opportunities presented themselves as “hard hat” tours of the on-going conservation work, which, to the delight of the donors helped to secure further contributions for the project. The daily free public tours allowed visual access to the Mural Room and the on-going work inside. There were also opportunities for the conservation team to present their progress to various community groups as “lunch time” learning sessions throughout the 10-week project.

There are hundreds of daily visitors to the Santa Barbara County Courthouse, from all corners of the globe. The Mural Room is a special public space used frequently by both the general public and event coordinators. Countless weddings are officiated in the Mural Room each year. The Mural Room has become a staple in the general history curriculum of local grade schools. Field trips to the Santa Barbara County Courthouse complex by design professionals, and those in educational tracks, occur on a daily basis. The Courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is California Historical Landmark No. 1037.

Learn more about the [Mural Room](#), and the [Santa Barbara County Courthouse](#).