

The judge has informed lawyers they'll need a better excuse to keep their clients out of jail.

DOT THE ROCKEL, and son Doug.

Enquirer photo BY MARK TREITEL

Mrs. Rockel is a spirited 39-year-old, who's about to leave mothering to younger women. If she can conceive again, she'll do it. But in the meantime, her energies are channeled into the presidency.

Once-Bright Murals Showing Signs Of Age

But Urban Wall Art Proving Expensive To Spruce Up

BY STEVEN ROSEN
Enquirer Reporter

On a Sunday morning, the rear parking lot of Covington's Peoples Liberty Bank of Northern Kentucky was empty, and Ralph Haile Jr. could gaze unobstructed at the wall mural.

It's called *Liberty*, inspired by a photograph of a packet steamboat that once traveled the Ohio River. On one section of roof, wooden slats are arranged to simulate a paddlewheel. The adjacent walls are painted in uneven sections of bright colors.

At least they're supposed to be in sections of bright colors. Many of those sections now show peeled paint, water stains, rust stains and cracks.

"I LOOKED up and saw it and said, 'Good God, that needs repainting,'" said Haile, the bank's president. It was his idea, in 1975, to commission the mural—one of about two dozen done in Greater Cincinnati during the last decade.

Urban beautification, it was called—often by those who didn't consider how bad the murals would look after 5 to 10 years of wear.

Cincinnati's 10 best-known murals were painted downtown in 1972, through the Urban Walls project organized by gallery owner Carl Solway. That project cost \$60,000—of which \$10,000 came through a state-administered federal grant. The rest of the money was privately raised by sale of portfolios of the artist-designed murals.

A program of that scope isn't likely to come again for a while.

"THE ONLY other (Ohio) city that has a fair number of them is Cleveland," said Deborah Davis-Liyach, visual arts co-ordinator for the Ohio Arts Council.

"We haven't had any applications for exterior wall grants in several years. There has been a decline in art for public places because the logical sponsors—governments—have been hit with financial setbacks."

And urban walls do cost money—whether sponsored by the public or private sector. Covington's *Liberty* (there was actually such a

boat in the early 1900s) cost about \$6,000 to design and paint in 1977. Haile is now seeking bids for renovation. "What this one's going to be, I'm highly curious."

Renovation won't come cheap—if two current projects by Cincinnati's Citizens' Committee on Youth (CCY) are any indication.

THAT NON-PROFIT group, which provides summer jobs for youths, is paying \$11,900 this summer to repaint two of Cincinnati's better-known neighborhood murals. Most of its funding comes from the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.

One project, the "black history" wall at the Arts Consortium office on Linn Street in the West End, is finished. The newly painted panorama gleams with representations of boxers and pushcart vendors, demonstrators and choir singers, politicians and scholars.

Right now, seven students are at work on a long concrete wall along William Howard Taft Road in Coryville, repainting a five-year-old mural depicting in eye-boggling color the glories of education.

Both these murals were originally done by CCY-paid teen-agers. "Generally, we tried to do some new art project each year," explained Ruth Meyer, the committee's spokeswoman.

"THIS YEAR, the walls were looking quite bad, and they were making the neighborhoods look bad. So we decided to conserve what we've got.

"On walls that are not painted, you tend to get graffiti; on walls that have been, we have not had any," she said. "It beautifies the area at the same time it serves a purpose."

Murals that are neglected can look as bad as graffiti.

One such example is painted on the wall of an Eastern Avenue railroad bridge in the East End. When executed in 1978 by students working with the nearby Seven Hills Neighborhood House, it was meant to celebrate community pride.

Now it's a mess of peeling paint and dirt streaks. In one panel, the dresses of two women entering a streetcar have been partially obliterated by a white chunky material formed where the paint cracked.

"WE HAD an abundance of summer workers, plus we thought it would upgrade

the walls. The supplies were donated," said Dorothy Yarbrough of Seven Hills. Her non-profit agency, which attempts to help inner-city youths, has no plans to sponsor a refurbishing.

Some of the privately maintained murals are still in good shape. For instance, the one painted on wood above the front entrance of Ghetto Dry Cleaners, on Green Street in Over-the-Rhine, hasn't faded a bit.

It's a well-executed portrait of an imaginary metropolis, with lights burning inside high-rise towers while nattily dressed folks fill the wide boulevards below.

Unfortunately, this mural suffers from a different problem—it calls attention to nothing. Ghetto Dry Cleaners is out of business and vacant.

PERHAPS NO mural has suffered a more ignoble fate than the "eye wall" along a building on McFarland Street—a small street between Elm and Plum streets.

It is one of Solway's original downtown Urban Walls, and its condition is so bad that someone actually scrawled a graffiti (the word, "Free") on one of the eyeballs. Peeling paint has effectively blinded one's view of some of the other eyeballs.

"The one that's in the worst condition is the eye wall," Solway said. "That seems to have been subjected to a lot of fading because of the amount of light it gets."

Only seven of the original murals remain—and one, the "kissing couple" at Fifth and Plum streets, was only saved through public outcry in 1978 when radio station WUBE tried to replace it with an advertisement.

SOLWAY BELIEVES the murals helped focus attention on downtown—especially on the West Fourth Street area where five of the murals are clustered.

"Ten years ago, we were talking about downtown redevelopment. Now it has been redeveloped," he said. "I think there's more interest in downtown now."

Of the remaining downtown Urban Walls, Solway said, four could use renovation. But maintenance is up to each building owner.

"The walls have gotten international publicity for the city. It would be nice for the city to maintain them," Solway said. "That's not going to come from the city budget, given their problems."

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