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Historic beauty: 1927 portion of Hale library returned to former glory

Kansas State University Libraries

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historic beauty

1927 PORTION OF HALE LIBRARY RETURNED TO FORMER GLORY

When most K-Staters think of Hale Library, their mind turns to beautiful Historic Farrell Library, which includes the Great Room, also affectionately known by current students as the Harry Potter room. However, there's more to this historic space! The 1927 portion of the library spans three floors, and over the last two years crew members have worked diligently to return the space to its former glory.

Historic Farrell Library was one of the most severely impacted areas of the library during the 2018 fire.

The three floors suffered heavy water damage.

In addition to two holes in the Great Room's roof from the fire itself, water used to douse the fire seeped into the walls, putting the murals at risk and warping the wooden tables throughout the space. The restoration process included removing every piece of the wooden ceiling beams, including the famous acorn finials, restoring each piece by hand and then reinstalling them in the exact same place. Last spring, after the ceiling was completed, crew members repaired all the plaster and

installed new lighting; soon after, the original bookshelves along the walls were repaired and varnished.

Since the third floor opened to the public, the Great Room has been very popular with students as a prime study spot. Before the fire, electrical outlets in the space were scarce and hard to reach. A top request from students was to add more. The renovated room has many more outlets than before, all at ground level for easy access.

RESTORING THE MURALS

Last fall, art conservators from John Canning & Co., a historical preservation and restoration company, worked to fully restore the four Great Room murals to pristine condition—not an easy task after what the art had been through.

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Back in 2018, Rachel Gilberti, the lead on the project, and her team came in to perform emergency work on the murals to save them from further damage. They were able to do so, but further restoration could not be done until the thick plaster wall had completely dried. With the walls completely dried last fall and construction on the rest of the room near completion, the team was able to finish the restoration of the murals within a matter of weeks.

"I like to see the transformation, because it's like bringing the building back to its original artistic conception," Gilberti said. "The artist for the murals considered colors and the scheme of the building itself when creating the art. If you look at the Home mural, [David] Overmyer actually reflects the Great Room windows onto the mural—you can see

the diamond pattern of the windows on the mural. That's a level of detail that most people wouldn't notice from the floor."

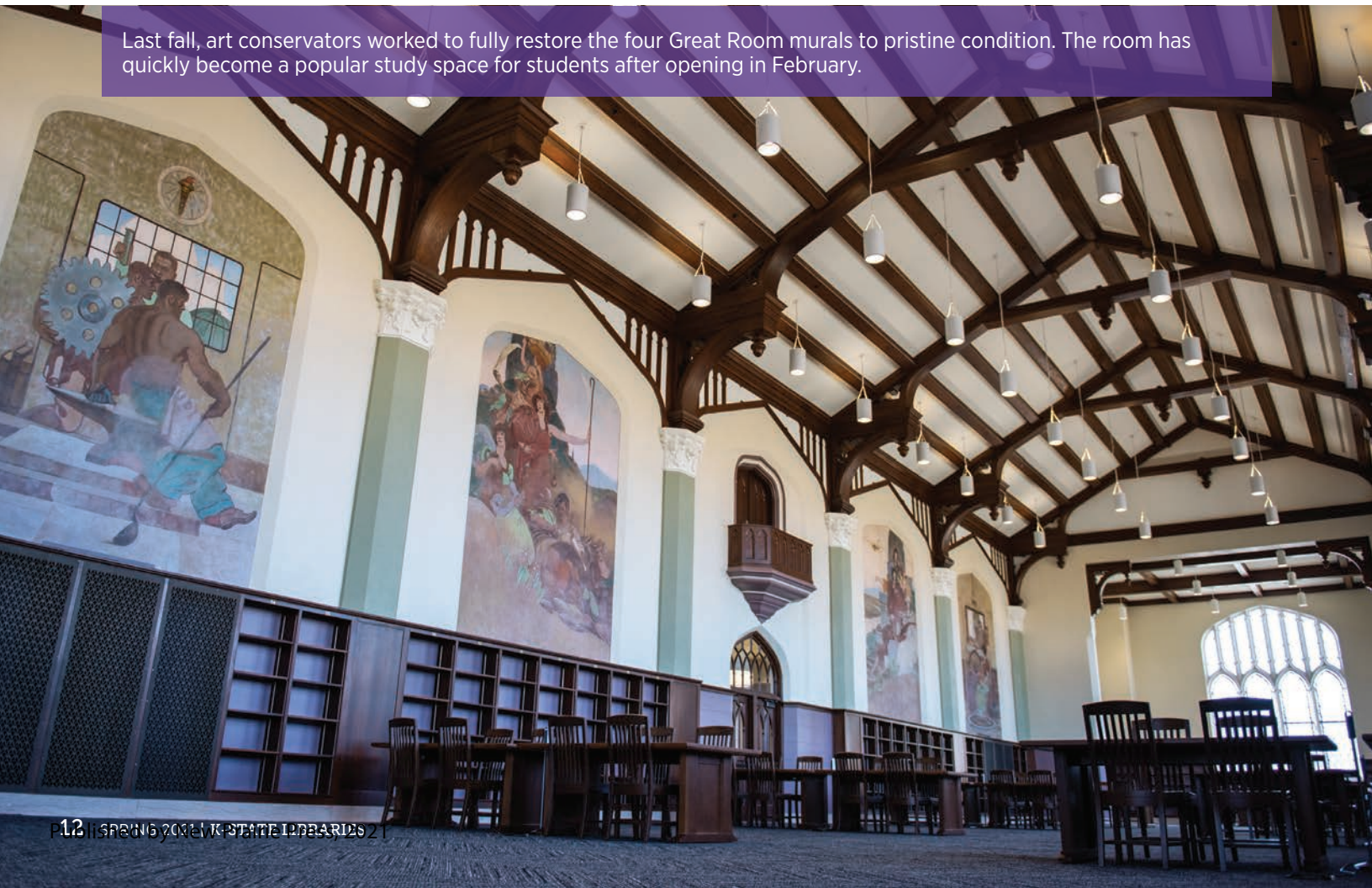
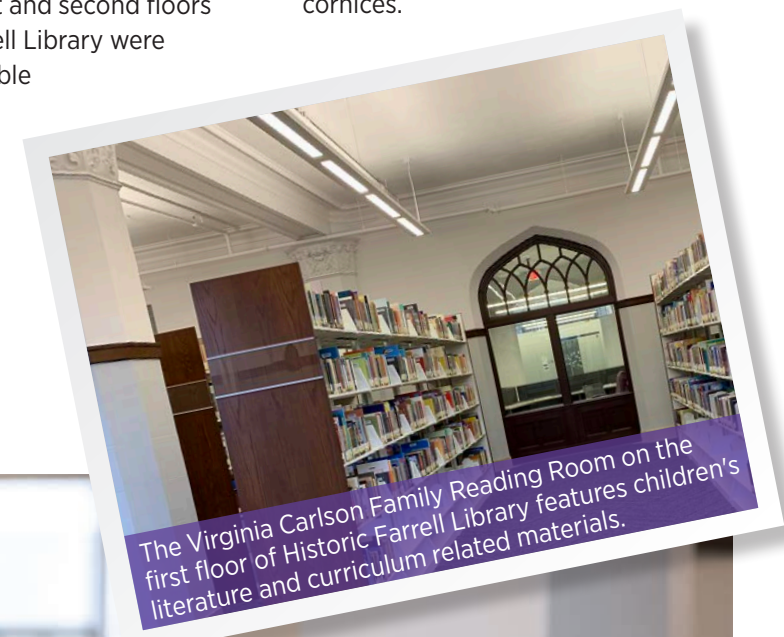
◆ [Learn about the history of the murals on page 16.](#)

BEYOND THE GREAT ROOM

The first and second floors within Historic Farrell Library have been enhanced to create an improved atmosphere for studying and reading. In 2018, the first and second floors of Historic Farrell Library were either inaccessible to students or filled with tall bookshelves that impeded the natural light from the windows and

allowed for very little study space. Deciding that these spaces were too beautiful to stay hidden, Libraries leadership focused on making the spaces more inviting for student study. Now, the spaces are more open, and fewer bookshelves are being used so that there is more natural light and room for seating.

Part of the charm of this section of the building is the floor to ceiling columns with decorative cornices.



The Virginia Carlson Family Reading Room is located on the first floor. It includes study space and houses the juvenile literature and curriculum materials collections. On the second floor of the historic space, a new reading room offers additional study space and houses the current periodicals. At the opposite end of the floor is the new home for the Dow Center for Multicultural and Community Studies.

The Dow Center provides access to a wide range of materials relating to multiculturalism and diversity.

"I'm most excited that we again have a space where students can study, celebrate and build community in a comfortable and safe location on campus," said web services librarian and coordinator for the Dow Center Tara Coleman. "This space is important because it provides folks a space to celebrate their culture and identity while learning more about the culture and identity of others."

RESTORING THE DREAM

The "We Are the Dream" mural on the fourth floor, in what is now the Academic Learning Center, is an important record of the struggle of K-State's underrepresented students to be seen and heard.

"We Are the Dream," which was sponsored by the Black Student Union,



Tara Coleman, coordinator for the Dow Center for Multicultural and Community Studies, stands at the entrance to its new location on the second floor.

Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Aztlan (MEChA, a Hispanic student group), and the Native American Indian Student Body, was dedicated on October 24, 1980, making it 40 years old. At that time, the fourth

floor space was home to the Minority Resource and Research Center. The fire started on the roof almost directly above the mural. Subsequently, the mural suffered from significant water damage and soiling—it even



Art conservators from John Canning & Co. hung the restored 'We Are the Dream' mural last fall.

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—RACHEL GILBERTI,
JOHN CANNING & CO. ART
CONSERVATOR



had mold trapped behind it. The paint created a barrier that inhibited the moisture from escaping, and so to allow the wall to dry out, art conservators had to remove the mural from the wall for cleaning.

Gilberti and her team also worked with the "We Are the Dream" mural and completed the restoration last fall shortly after finishing the Great Room murals.

One of the most obvious differences in the mural to those who had seen it before the fire was how absolutely vivid the colors are. The rich color and mixed artistic styles draws the eye and gives the mostly neutral fourth floor space a burst of personality and purpose.

“It is comfortable and calming, and there are always spaces to sit or stand or work. It is meant to be lived in, not just walked through.”

— ZOE THOMPSON, JUNIOR



The heart of campus

HOME SWEET HALE

As students and community members re-explore the building, one thing has become clear: Hale Library retains its importance as the heart of campus.

"I think Hale is important because it's the center of campus, both literally and figuratively. It's like all libraries in that it's a sort of neutral place where anyone can go and feel welcome whether it's to study, have a coffee or spend time with friends," said Zoe Thompson, a junior in anthropology. "It is comfortable and calming, and there are always spaces to sit or stand or work. It is meant to be lived in, not just walked through."

"There is so much symbolism that is representative of a diverse student body here," Gilberti said. "This is a great time in history to put this mural back on the wall. I think students will really appreciate having something that stands for unity, peace and diversity."

Thank you to all our donors for ensuring that Hale Library remains a home for current and future Wildcats. Without your support, Hale Library would not be where it is today. ■