



## The History of Tennessee Mural

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE, TN

Our conservators worked to preserve Marion Greenwood's 1954 oil on canvas painting "The History of Tennessee," located at the University of Tennessee (UT.) Though the painting was cleaned and repaired after someone vandalized it in 1970, the artist who restored it did not use a strong enough varnish, and some of the later paint came off as experts removed it from the wall of the University Center ballroom. The conservation team completed the inpainting — filling missing or deteriorated parts of the mural with new paint — in just two days and then applied a new, stronger varnish to the mural. Once the varnish dried, the painting went into storage off-site. EverGreene completed the fast-track project in a short five-week schedule, providing single-source responsibility for this project.

The 29-foot-by-6-foot, 300-pound, oil on canvas painting captures the music culture of the state, from the Mississippi Delta blues of West Tennessee to the mountain music of East Tennessee. But the depiction of a cotton-picking slave or sharecropper among African-American musicians and other characters ignited controversy in the decade after UT was integrated. UT decided to cover the mural with paneling in 1972. It remained hidden for 34 years until student groups asked to have it uncovered for a special event, featured as part of a special showing at the university's downtown gallery space for a 2014 summer exhibition. Afterward, UT covered it with Plexiglas and curtains, making it available to classes and other groups for educational purposes.

The University officials made a decision to remove the mural in an effort to preserve it as part of preparations to raze the University Center to make way for a new student center. Ewing Gallery Director Sam Yates said the controversy may help encourage people in the community to come see the work for themselves, though he hopes the painting is not as divisive as it was four decades ago.

MORE INFORMATION:

<https://evergreene.com/projects/the-history-of-tennessee-mural/>

### SERVICES PERFORMED

Conservation Treatments  
Murals

### PROJECT DETAILS

**Muralist**  
Marion Greenwood

