

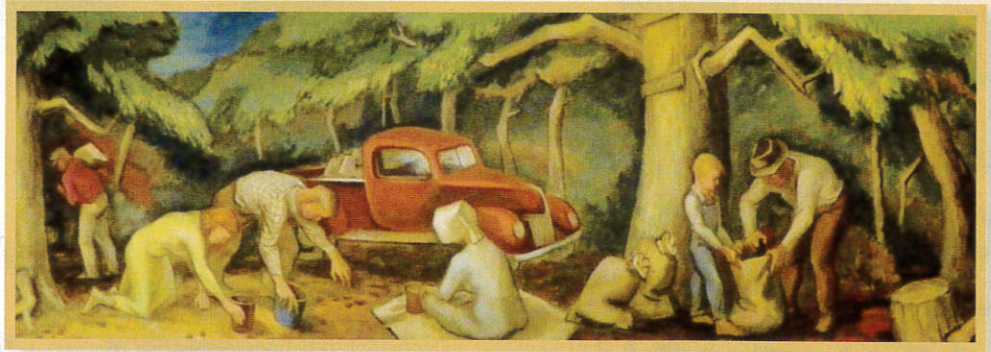
[SECRETS AND GEMS]

Hidden Treasures

If you aren't careful when you walk into the Worthington National Bank building in Arlington, you'll miss the mural entirely. It's off to the left, tucked into a corner of the wall near the ceiling. But when you do finally see the painting, it will take your breath away. Otis Dozier's 1941 work, **Gathering Pecans** (pictured), depicts six people harvesting nuts. The mural is about the last thing you'd expect to see in a post office, which is what the building was when Dozier created the painting.

But that was the point, says Michael R. Grauer of the Panhandle Plains Historical Museum in Canyon. Dozier's painting was one of almost 150 commissioned for post offices and federal buildings throughout Texas during the Great Depression.

The murals were completed between 1934 and 1943 in association with four programs run by the Works Progress Administration and the Treasury Department. The artists who received commissions weren't necessarily well-known, but they were talented and needed work, Grauer says.



Typically, the paintings depicted local historical scenes or industries. The murals were usually painted on canvas before being attached to a wall, as in Arlington, but some works—including Peter Hurd's *Old Pioneers in Big Spring*—are true frescoes painted directly onto a wall's surface.

In recent years, some two dozen of the murals have gone missing—either painted over, removed from their buildings, destroyed, or otherwise lost. The remaining works are in various states of repair. But Grauer is hopeful that some will soon be restored. He points to a 1939 mural in Lamesa. Local residents and a nonprofit foundation shipped the painting to California to be cleaned. Newly restored, *The Horse Breakers* now hangs on a prominent wall in the Forrest Park Community Center.

"These murals were great sources of pride for their communities," he says. "And today, they're great sources of pride again." wpamurals.com/texas/htm. —Jeff Siegel

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