

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Episode 1: "The Art of the Missouri Capitol"

Guest: Bob Priddy

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KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. Today, we are speaking with Bob Priddy. If you have listened to the *Missourinet* over the past forty-plus years, you will certainly recognize his voice. For his substantial career in radio journalism, Priddy was inducted into the Missouri Broadcaster's Association Hall of Fame in 2018. He is also a noted author with several books to his credit including *Only the Rivers are Peaceful*, *The Taos Connection*¹, and *Across Our Wide Missouri*. Since 2016, he has served as the President of the Board of Trustees for the State Historical Society of Missouri. His most recent book, *The Art of the Missouri Capitol*, was a collaborative work with Jeffrey Ball and was published in 2011. In it, Priddy and Ball provide an expansive overview of the present Missouri State Capitol building from the destruction of its predecessor by lightning in 1911 to the contemporary efforts to preserve its pristine existence along the banks of the Missouri River. Along the way, the authors offer the reader a well-researched story of the capitol's construction adjoined by stunning photographs and images that document the building's rich history. Welcome to the *Our Missouri Podcast*, Bob Priddy!

BOB PRIDDY: Thank you! I'm glad to be here.

SEAN ROST: Could you tell us about the origins of your book? What drew you to write a book about the Missouri State Capitol?

BOB PRIDDY: Well, working in the capitol for forty years as a reporter certainly gives you an idea of some things to write about or think about as you wander the halls, and you appreciate the great artwork there and the history that is made there every day. So, sooner or later, you start to

¹ "The Taos Connection" was an article published in the *Missouri Historical Review*. For more information see Bob Priddy, "The Taos Connection: New Mexican Art in Missouri's Capitol," *Missouri Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (January 1985): 143-166.

think about a book, or I started to think about a book, and the original plan was to write a book about the history of the construction and the decoration of the capitol. And my co-author, Jeff Ball, and I, sat down and started working on this and some of the antecedents of this we will talk about a little bit later. But, I started to write the thing, and by the time we got to a thousand pages of the manuscript, we realized that there was an awful lot we were not including yet, and a lot of holes in the stories that we hadn't researched yet. And, if we took it to a publisher and tried to boil everything down to fit into a 450 page book, we were going to leave out an awful lot of the stories of either the construction or the decoration. So, I made the decision at that point that we were going to do a book about the artwork first because that's the thing people see most often when they come to the capitol. That's the thing they remember. So, we went to work, then, on plugging all of the gaps we had to plug, and going to work on gathering the research that we needed to research to do the artwork. Finally, the result was *The Art of the Missouri Capitol* that came out in 2011.

SEAN ROST: Were there any organizations or individuals who gave you support for the overall project?

BOB PRIDDY: Well, the State Historical Society, of course, is a main resource for us. There were other places that we went to that gave us a lot of information. The Archives of American Art in Washington D.C. were most helpful. But in terms of any financial support while we were doing this, no, this was all done on our own initiative. The largest part of the book was material that I researched and wrote. Jeff's main contribution was his master's thesis which was about the murals of the capitol. There's no way the book could have been done without his study about the murals, and the way, as an art historian himself, that he was able to properly phrase the various parts of that story. So, the book is partly his master's thesis and then a lot of it is research that we either discovered or fell through the transom in various ways during the time or that we had already had done for some time in the years before.

SEAN ROST: Now, if someone were to visit the capitol today, they would find a lot of scaffolding and construction work due to the kind of ongoing kind of maintenance and repairs that are going to be over several years. Thinking back to your project and your book on kind of the construction and the artwork of the capitol, if someone were to walk to the capitol grounds say in 1918, one hundred years ago, what would it have looked like to that person?

BOB PRIDDY: 1918, it would have looked very similar to the way it looks now because the building would have been completed by then. Now, some of the decorations, some of the statuary, and the fountains, and things like that, were installed over a period of years for the next decade until about 1928. So, this person in 1918 would probably not see Ceres on the dome. Would not see some of the statuary of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Would probably not see the fountains in the front yard, unless they had a vision of some kind. They certainly wouldn't see the things around in back on the river side that we now have, including the pool and the fountain of the centaurs and the signing of the treaties statuary and the veterans' memorial and the police memorial and even the liberty bell. All of those things are fairly late in the development of the decorations of the capitol. What they would see if they went there in 1918, they would see the building. They would see that the landscaping was not complete. In fact, they

might get stuck in the mud. The road around the capitol would be different, especially in the south front of the capitol. Instead of the circular driveway on the south front that mirrors the circular driveway on the north side, the river side, there would have been a driveway that came up from the west and formed a little keyhole loop and then the street that ran right in front of the steps of the capitol which was originally Stewart Street in Jefferson City. People would park their cars with their noses right up against the front steps of the capitol for many years until that circular drive was put in in the 1960s. So, that would be a big difference that people would notice. In 1918, they would see old Model T's and Chevrolets and cars like that parked with their noses up against the steps. They'd also see a lot of smoke because Jefferson City was a coal-fired town. The railroad was right below it so there was a lot of train smoke that came up. And so, it would be a situation where the air would be quite a bit dirtier. So what they would see would be a capitol that was getting dirty sooner, and they would be breathing that same air.

SEAN ROST: Now, scholars are able to produce books and articles on historical topics because of access to key documents on specific subjects. Yet, as you point out in your book, the records of the Capitol Decoration Commission have, over time, disappeared.

BOB PRIDY: That's right.

SEAN ROST: What happened to them, and how were you able to locate information about the commission's work?

BOB PRIDY: Well, if we knew what happened to them, we'd be able to find them. [laughs] But, that was the biggest hurdle we had. That's why it took ten years to write the book because we had to go out and scope out the various resources that we had to look at. So, some of these things were just things that we stumbled across by accident, and some of them were done by detective work. You know, you just pick something, you pick a thread, and you follow that thread and see where it takes you, and that's what we had to do with a lot of these things. There are some files in Saint Louis. Some of the letters to one of the commissioners, the decoration commissioners, are in his files at the Missouri Historical Society. I think in Washington University. And so, we started out with those letters which weren't really very detailed, but that was the start. Over a period of time, we came across places where we found other letters and other references. One of the places that I talked to was—one of the places I visited was the Archives of American Art in Washington, that I mentioned earlier, because they have a lot of the personal papers of several of the artists and sculptors that decorated the capitol. Once we got into those, we were able to get a fairly good idea of what was going on. But some of these things were just completely fortuitous. The prime example of that is the Frank Brangwyn material. He was the one who painted the murals in the rotunda on the first floor and the third floor and clear up in the eye of the dome. We were afraid that we were going to—one of us at least was going to have to go to London because that's where he lived and worked and dig around in his papers there. But, one day I was working in the capitol covering the state Senate as a reporter and it just so happened that during the lunch hour when I was down in my press room on the first floor that was the precise time that one of the capitol tour guides brought a little old man in to the room and he was from London and he had come to see the Brangwyn murals. This fellow turned out to be the son of Brangwyn's top aide who helped him paint those murals, and he had just

transcribed his father's journals into a book which he just happened to have and gave me. So, all of the sudden, we had prime research material on the creation of this third floor murals. Now, we didn't have the first floor yet, but we knew that Allen True, an artist from Denver, had been a student of Brangwyn's before World War I, and we checked the Archives of American Art and we learned that True had gone to England in about 1923, I think it was, because True had a contract to paint sixteen small paintings in the third floor small dome areas. So, he went over to England to have Brangwyn help him with these works, but also to help Brangwyn with his first floor paintings. He spent a year over there with his family, and he wrote letters back to his mother in Denver and those letters were at the archives in Washington. So now we had the firsthand reports, the firsthand experience, of how the first floor murals were created, and it's one of the more human stories of the whole book because at the end of the year, True wrote to his mother and said that he and his family were headed home because he had some commissions with the Nebraska capitol and at the Colorado capitol, his home state, and he needed to get home and start taking care of those. And he wrote that he hoped to stop by Brangwyn's house on the way home to Southampton where they were going to take the seven day boat to New York and he hoped to see Brangwyn to say goodbye but he wasn't sure he'd be able to because Mrs. Brangwyn was very ill and he was by her bedside. Now, we don't know if they saw each other, but we do know that the day the boat sailed from Southampton, Mrs. Brangwyn died. And in March, the following March, True gets a telegram from Brangwyn that says he has completed the Missouri paintings and they're being shipped to the capitol and he would like True to go to Jefferson City and help put up the murals. And then he said something like, "Normally when I finish a great commission, there is someone I can celebrate with, but there is no one now, and sometimes I wish I could join my late wife." And this was 1924. He lived another seventeen years or so. But, it was a very human touch to this story of the artwork, and that's one of the things we wanted to do with the book was not just talk about the artwork and what the artwork portrayed, we wanted to talk about how the artwork was created and we also want people to know who read this book who these artists were because we've forgotten who these artists were in American art right now, but in their time, these artists and sculptors were among the foremost artists and sculptors in America, if not in the world, like Brangwyn. So, this was a huge thing that was going on in Missouri. We were hiring the nation's best people to decorate our building. That's because we had a million dollars left over from the bond issue. The building cost four million. We had a million left for the decoration. No other capitol in America has twenty percent of its cost invested in the decoration of the building, and that's why ours is considered to be one of the great buildings when it comes to decoration in the whole country. One of the great capitols. So we had twenty percent of our total cost that we could spend on the decoration.

SEAN ROST: Most of the images of your book include wonderful photographs and images related to the capitol and those who worked on its construction, decorations, artwork, and sculptures. Where did you access a lot of these photographs, and what are some good collections that you found along the way that really gave information for you?

BOB PRIDDY: The Archives of American Art provided a lot of illustrations, pictures of these artists. There were some places where we went to the rotogravure sections of a newspaper. Now, the rotogravure sections of newspapers were special sections printed on paper that doesn't hold

up well over time. But it was high quality paper so you got high quality photographic reproductions. And so, when you go to the rotogravure sections of newspapers, you can take photographs of that picture on their page and you get a pretty good photographic image that you normally wouldn't get in a newspaper in those days. So there were some things where we went to that. But mostly, it was from the Archives of American Art or we went to the hometowns of some of these artists and checked on various sources there to see who would have a photograph of them. Sometimes, we simply went to the internet and googled them and looked at the Google images and if it was a public domain image we could get that. If it wasn't, we wrote away to get permission from some people to publish something. The Missouri Historical Society in Saint Louis had a couple of pictures that we used. They gave us permission to do that for a little fee, but it wasn't bad. So, we just went to a lot of different places to find what we could scrounge together. The color pictures were done by Lloyd Grotjan, who is a Jefferson City photographer who runs Full Spectrum Photo in Jefferson City, and he was hired by the second capitol commission, as it was called in those days, it has since lost the "second" designation, but he was hired to do architectural photography of the building and to photograph all of these pictures. And so the color pictures that you see in this book, for the most part, of the artwork, are Lloyd's, and that was the first time anybody had ever really done high quality photography work of these pictures which was interesting because I learned many years ago when I went around and just took some pictures myself just for a little lecture I was going to give here or there, that the halls were so dark that there are things you don't see unless you take a picture and then you can properly illuminate the picture and all of the sudden details come out that you otherwise wouldn't notice. So, that's what we did. We just chased down pictures wherever we had to go. There were some Brangwyn pictures that we took out—well, there was one Brangwyn picture, especially, that we took out of a book that Brangwyn wrote that came out in about 1920 or '24. And that was a picture of him sitting on the scaffolding next to one of great, big figures in the third floor mural upstairs so that you got an idea of how big the head of this figure was compared to Brangwyn who was sitting next to it. You don't get an idea just how large some of these figures are because you're standing twenty or twenty-five feet below them and looking up and so your perspective is much different. But it's only when you see him next to one of these figures that you understand how big everything was that he was working on. His paintings in the capitol are just amazing to me. Most of the paintings in there are on flat surfaces. But Brangwyn's murals are so large, and then he's working on a double curve. He's working on a curve vertically and a curve horizontally. Plus, he's working to put pictures up at an elevation so he has to distort the image that's on his canvas so that it looks normal to the people who are looking at it from a long distance down below. As someone who is not an artist, I just find that process amazing that he did that and they're such stunning pictures.

SEAN ROST: Now, as someone comes in to Jefferson City, especially from the east going west on Highway 50, they'll pass by an exit for Taos, Missouri, which is not too far outside of Jefferson City. But yet, there is a larger connection to the community of Taos, New Mexico, for the Missouri State Capitol building. Could you tell us a little bit about the New Mexico artist that worked on the capitol?

BOB PRIDDY: Well, that's one of the first thing that I got curious about when I started working at the capitol. I went to Jefferson City in 1967. I had been there earlier. Our senior class at Sullivan High School in Illinois instead of going New York or New Orleans or Washington D.C. for their senior trip we went to Kirkwood Lodge at the Lake of the Ozarks. And on the way home, we stopped at the Missouri capitol. We took a tour, and of course, everybody remembers going in to the House Lounge for the Benton mural. And so, when I came to work here in Jefferson City in '67, one of the first things I did was go to the capitol, and of course I went to the House Lounge, but I started to circulate through the halls and just enjoy the paintings. I got a copy of the 1928 final report of the decoration commission. It was published in a hardback book. It lacked a lot of the details, of course, that we put in our book. But nonetheless, I noticed that an awful lot of the lunettes, especially on the second floor, were done by artists from Taos, New Mexico. And I thought, now why did we hire all these guys from New Mexico? In 1984, when I was visiting my sister-in-law and her family in Albuquerque, I decided I was going to go to Taos and see if I could find some of the children of these artists and I found two of them. I had wonderful interviews with these two women who were by then in their seventies, and as I dug around even more and more, it turned out that I found a story or something, and maybe it was something one of the women told me, that Arthur Kocian who was on the commission and was a noted art dealer in Saint Louis with the Noonan-Kocian Art Gallery was good friends of Oscar Berninghaus who displayed his works at the gallery. Berninghaus was one of the founders of the Taos Society of Artists because he'd been hired by the Santa Fe Railroad many years before to go down to the Southwest and do paintings of the Southwest for the Santa Fe Railroad calendar. And he wound up in Taos with a few of the other artists from back East. He fell in love with the area, and of anybody who has ever been to Taos knows that it is a stunningly beautiful part of New Mexico. It's clear air and clean air, and it's just ideal for painting. One day, John Pickard, who was the chairman of the commission, the decoration commission, was talking to Berninghaus, as the story goes, as I think the story goes, and he mentioned that they were looking for some people who could paint Indians because Indians had such an important role in early Missouri history. Berninghaus said, "Well, if you are looking for people who can paint Indians, why don't you come to Taos because there is a whole colony of people down there that paint Indians." Because this is right next to the Taos pueblo so there are a lot of Indians. So, all of these artists did a lot of painting of Indians. So, Pickard went down there and met with the Taos Society of Artists, and he hired all of them but one to paint paintings for the capitol. And he was so taken by Taos that he bought a house just across the street from Ernest Blumenschein who was one of the Taos artists that was hired and he moved down there. His daughter lived there, and was born there, and was raised there, and lived in Taos. So, all of the sudden, I find there's this link between how we got the link together with the Taos Society of Artists. Well then it was the matter of checking newspapers, and I got access to the Taos newspaper collection down there, and we were able to run down a number of articles about his visit and then the Taos artists signing their contracts, and working the progression of when they finished their paintings and brought them up here and put them in place. So, we got that part of it taken care pretty well. I met the granddaughter of one of the artists, E.I. Couse, who still operates the Couse Museum and Studio in Taos where you can go through it. And she's still there. We got to talking a couple of times, and one of the things that she mentioned was how important the capitol project was for

the Taos artists because in those times Taos was still a fairly unknown art community. As still is the case in many respects these days, if it's artwork that is produced west Alleghenies, it's just not worth art. In fact, Pickard complained when he was going to work on the commission that his main complaint was that there were too many artists who were not tall enough to see over the Alleghenies. Well, anyway, so I was talking to Virginia Couse Leavitt was her name, and she mentioned that most of these artists made very little money. So, being able to do twenty-some paintings for the Missouri capitol and exhibit them all over the place before they came to the capitol was just, first of all, a major economic boom for them because they were getting a thousand dollars per painting when some of them were only making a thousand dollars a year before that. Plus, the publicity they were getting called a lot of attention to the Taos Society of Artists, and that helped that society grow and prosper. Some of these guys turned out to do very, very well, and some of their paintings are worth six figures now. But, this capitol project turned out to be a great impedance for the Taos Society of Artists. So, I wound up talking to children and grandchildren of some of these artists and then piecing together newspaper articles. There'd been books written about them, too, so I got into some of that. But that's how we put together the story of the Taos artists. In fact, sometime in the mid-80s, I gave the speech at the annual meeting about the Taos artists and it was published in the *Missouri Historical Review* and somebody read it in Taos and sent me a note and said, "You left out some stuff." So he sent me a little book that he'd written which was the minutes of the Taos Society of Artist meetings and steered me in some other directions to pick up more information. So all of that went into files that eventually went into the book.

SEAN ROST: Now, you mentioned paintings, and certainly the Taos community that really benefitted from this work, and for anyone who visits the capitol, there is one piece of artwork that is very central and that, of course, is the Thomas Hart Benton mural in the House Lounge. Could you tell us a little bit about the history of how that came to be?

BOB PRIDDY: Yeah. I wrote a book about that one, too. [laughs] This was a long time ago. This was back in '89, I think, I wrote a book called *Only the Rivers are Peaceful: The Missouri Mural of Thomas Hart Benton*. Well, of course, since that's the mural everybody remembers, that's something that you want to think about when you want to write about the artwork of the capitol. A friend of mine named Jim Bogan at what was then the University of Missouri-Rolla, now Missouri University of Science & Technology—Jim Bogan was a student of Tom Benton and Jim Bogan was also good friends of a fellow from Boonville who was a folk singer who sang songs about Benton and he also was friends with a professor at the University of Missouri-Rolla who also did some lectures on Thomas Hart Benton. So Bogan put together a series of three of us, and got underwriting from the Missouri Council for the Humanities or the Missouri Council for the Arts, I don't remember what, and for two years, the three of us went around to three different cities each year, three different universities each year, and did lectures about Thomas Hart Benton. My choice was the Benton Mural. The reason that I was able to do the Benton Mural was because not long after I moved to Jefferson City, I got to know the mayor of Jefferson City very well and his name was John G. Christy. John G. Christy was the first man to serve more than two terms as Speaker of the House of Representatives. He served three terms out of the four that he was in the legislature. Served three terms as Speaker. He was the Speaker when

Benton was hired to paint the mural. And he was telling me one day that he hated that mural. In fact, he was telling me that one day before the start of the 1937 Session, because the mural was finished December of '36, and although he was the Speaker of the House and was supposedly kind of in charge, he lived in Festus and there wasn't any reason to come to Jefferson City between Sessions so he hadn't really seen it until he walked in there just before the legislative session started and this lounging room, a room where people were supposed to be able to go and rest and smoke and take naps and play cards, or just talk to get away from the hurly burly of the House floor, he knew could never be a place of relaxation again because, as he put it, these figures were just jumping off the wall at you. He told me that the day before the session started he was having breakfast at a hotel and the Majority Floor Leader walked in, and Christy who was about 6'2 and had one of these booming voices, he was one of these guys who once he starts rolling you can't get him to shut up until he takes a breath. So, he saw the Majority Floor Leader and flagged him over to his table and he said, "Morris, have you seen those damnable paintings in the House Lounge?" And the Floor Leader immediately got flustered. And Christy started going on about it. He said, "Those are the worst things I've ever seen. When we go in to session this morning, I want you to introduce a resolution to have them painted over." The Floor Leader got really nervous and he was really starting to shake, and Christy kept rolling. And finally, Christy stopped to take a breath and at that point the Floor Leader walked over and grabbed him by the front of the shirt and he said, "Mr. Speaker, don't you know that Mr. Benton is sitting right behind you." [laughs] And he was. And, you know, Benton was only about 5'4, and so standing up, he was about as tall as Christy was sitting down. About that time, Christy said a sweet young thing came in to the restaurant and saw Benton and hustled over to the table and said, "Oh, Mr. Benton, I've just been to the capitol. I've seen your painting. It's the most wonderful painting I've ever seen in my life. Can I have your autograph?" Christy said he never looked at her. He got up and he came over and he stood next to Christy's chair and he said, "Young lady, I have heard some comments about art from somebody who knows nothing about the subject and if he studied the rest of his life would know even less." He stormed out of the room and didn't come back for twenty-five years. Well, the resolution, I think, was never passed, of course. Benton always said he knew they'd never pass the resolution because they weren't going to admit they paid \$16,000 for such a mistake. But he, for about the next year or so, defended that mural from all kinds of critics, and I think he really loved to defend it because most of his critics were not nearly the intellect that Tom Benton was. But, that was 1936 when that mural was completed, and it still speaks to people today with the social history of Missouri. And that's why it was important, it was the social history. He didn't try to paint a political history or paint a military history. It is a social history of Missouri. So, it's a story of people and the movement of people through the decades that make Missouri what it is today. It's a much broader topic. You're talking to everybody with this painting. You're not just talking to those who are interested in politics. You're not just talking to those who are interested in military history. You're talking about the history of all of the people of the state of Missouri in this one painting. So, that's the kind of thing he was working on was something that represented all of Missouri, not just a part of it. He got a lot of static for a naked baby, for some dancing girls at a Kansas City businessmen's meeting. He included Tom Pendergast, the great political boss of Kansas City, who at that time was starting to run into trouble with the government. Jesse James is in there. And there is slavery

portrayed in there. A lot of people thought these are things that we shouldn't really have in a mural glorifying our state. Benton really said he was not interested in glorifying the state, he was interested in portraying the history of the people of the state, and as he put it, "You cannot tell the truth of history unless you tell it warts and all." So, that's why we have some parts of the mural that a lot of people questioned at that time. Christy never did admit that it's a great painting. He did finally admit that other people, including his sister, could think it was a great painting, but he never could.

SEAN ROST: Now, as someone who has visited nearly every corner of the capitol building over your fifty-plus year career there, what is your favorite piece of artwork?

BOB PRIDY: Oh, you're trying to ask me who's my favorite child. I've been asked this question quite often and I don't know whether it is the artwork or whether it is the story behind the artwork that I like so much. I mean, it is hard to beat the Brangwyn story that I talked to you about earlier. In terms of just art, I think it's difficult to beat N.C. Wyeth's paintings of *The Battle of Wilson's Creek* and *The Battle of Westport*. N.C. Wyeth was the nation's foremost magazine illustrator at this time. He was a master of the use of light and shadow and smoke and clouds, and especially the Wilson's Creek Battle shows that mastery. He wrote his mother, and I came across a book of his letters while I was doing all of this—well, actually before I was doing all this. But the book contained several letters that he wrote his mother while he was painting these two paintings. And, he also described the day that he came to the capitol to put them on the wall. And they had an art day to dedicate the paintings. But he said in his letters, one of his letters to his mother, that he thought this commission could change his life, could change his career, because he would moving from being simply an illustrator to being an artist, to being an easel artist. I started looking at a list of his works after that, and it did because before this he was predominantly illustrating magazine and books, and after this he did very little of that but did an awful lot of easel paintings and it was almost a complete reversal. It was two-to-one illustration before, two-to-one easel paintings afterwards. But, I think from strictly the pure artistic impact, *The Battle of Wilson's Creek* would be my favorite piece of work in that building. I think it is only rivaled by Frank Nuderscher's painting of *The Artery of Trade* which was the Eads Bridge, which it was painted from the East Saint Louis side showing the Eads Bridge and it's just a really powerful image that has, among other things, it's a painting where the bridge turns directions on you as you walk past it. But still, it's just a very powerful image of basically the East driving its way across the Mississippi River into the West. There is a counterpart across the gallery from Kansas City looking from Kansas City towards Kansas and it's much more peaceful. In the eastern painting of Nuderscher, the East is powerfully coming into the West and then across the gallery you see the ripples from all of that have expanded now out to Kansas City and you're standing on a bluff in Kansas City looking across the river to Kansas and the West is beckoning and saying, "Don't stop now, keep coming." So, you have these two paintings, but the Eads Bridge one is especially powerful.

SEAN ROST: Now, in the third floor rotunda, there are a series of bronze busts that have been done over the years that make up what is called the Hall of Famous Missourians. Could you tell

us a little bit about some of the people featured in that Hall, and some people you think should be featured in that Hall?

BOB PRIDDY: Well, yeah, the Hall of Famous Missourians, I was in on the founding of the Hall of Famous Missourians to a degree, I guess. The Hall of Famous Missourians originated with some women who were wives of members of the legislature. And they felt that the capitol needed some new artwork. There hadn't been anything new put in the building since the 1950s when William Knox did three lunettes. So, they thought something new needed to be added. They decided to have some gridiron shows. Now, the gridiron shows are kind of like they do in Washington D.C. sometimes. They are shows where there are various acts and skits put on by various groups and they kind of satirize what's going on in state government. So, the House would have a skit and the Senate would have a skit and the Governor's Office would have one, the press corps had one. So, I was in on the press corps stuff. And the first time we did that, there were two or three of those held, I think. So, we did the three of them and raised enough money to commission four busts by Bill Williams, William J. Williams. So, that's how it all started. People are surprised when they visit the Hall of Famous Missourians to see who the famous Missourians are. Nobody realizes that—Thomas Hart Benton and Mark Twain and somebody like that—yeah—they don't realize others though. There are others in the Hall of Famous Missourians people don't think about. Walter Cronkite is in there. The famous CBS correspondent. Betty Grable. Ginger Rogers. Marlin Perkins, who had a television show called the *Wild Kingdom* sponsored by Mutual of Omaha for many years. He was from Saint Louis. [Edwin] Hubble for whom the Hubble Telescope is named is in there. He was from southwest Missouri. Laura Ingalls Wilder is in there. Emmett Kelly, the great clown, is in there, along with Joyce Hall of Hallmark Cards. James S. McDonnell of McDonnell-Douglas Aircraft. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the nation's foremost twentieth century philosophers. John G. Neihardt, who was one of my professors here and was one of those who really changed my life, I think. He was an epic poet who wrote about the American West and I took his course and it changed my whole focus on history. As an Illinois boy growing up on the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln, all the sudden I had the course under Neihardt, which was a poetry course about the development of the American West, the same semester that I had Lewis Atherton's course, who was a former President of the Historical Society, on the history of the West that he taught from the historical standpoint. So, those two courses ganged up on me and changed me completely. But, Neihardt is in there. Jack Buck is in there. A.T. Still, the founder of osteopathic medicine, is in there. Dale Carnegie, who wrote *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Rose Philippine Duchesne, who was the first saint from west of the Mississippi River, she's in there. Josephine Baker, who was a great entertainer in the 1920s up to the 1960s, who was an African American who was born in Saint Louis, but because of her race couldn't really work in Saint Louis on a broad scale. She went to Paris and became the "dark star of the Folies Bergère," part of the French underground during World War II, ran an orphanage after the war that took in children of all races and all nationalities, and she was one of the first African American celebrities to stand up with Martin Luther King during the civil rights struggle and encouraged others to get in. So, those are just some, and people are just regularly amazed that these names they've heard of are actually fellow Missourians.

SEAN ROST: Is there anybody you think that should be added?

BOB PRIDDY: Oh, a lot of people.

SEAN ROST: Or, that you would suggest to be added?

BOB PRIDDY: Every time there's a new Speaker of the House, I send them a long letter that lists a long list of people that I think should be in there. T.S. Eliot is one. Oh, it's such a long list, I can't really remember all of them. We're a little bit heavy right now on movie and television stars, so we need to get more literary, political people. And some people who are not alive in terms of politics. We've got some living politicians who are in there, and the capitol commission has since asserted some authority and tightened the requirements that you don't put a living politician in there. But, yeah, there's a whole list of people that I think should be in there because of what they've done and a lot of them are pretty well known folks. If I had my list in front of me, we'd spend the next five minutes reading the list. [laughs]

SEAN ROST: Now, lastly, as someone who has traveled throughout the country, and certainly someone who has spent your own time in the capitol building, what other state capitol buildings have you visited and how would you compare them, if you can, to Missouri's state capitol?

BOB PRIDDY: I don't think you can really compare them because of the quality of the artwork we have, and because our commission coordinated what the artwork was going to be about. I've been to a lot of capitols that certainly don't have much artwork to speak of. Arkansas is the most boring capitol I've ever been in. To be very blunt about it. The New York capitol in Albany is just a mess. Our capitol commission board that oversaw construction of our capitol visited Albany just when they were touring some capitols to get ideas. They toured Albany and they basically said the New York capitol represents everything wrong about a capitol that can be wrong. The New York capitol, I think, had four different architects each designing a different floor. The interior is dark. There's carvings that have nothing to do with the city of New York. In fact, I think one of the carvings on one of the stairways is of one of the architect's children. So, it's just its dark, it's big, it's ugly, and terrible. [laughs] New Mexico's capitol is a modern building. It's a round building, doesn't have a dome on it, per se. They call it the Roundhouse down there. But, it's very modern. It's kind of shaped in the tradition in the Anasazi kivas, the worship centers that you find in cliff dwellings. So, they've done a great job on the heritage of that and it's very nicely done. I like it a lot. My native state of Illinois, its capitol was done in the 1880s so that's a thirty year older building and you see a thirty year older theory of architecture for state buildings. Has very little artwork in it. Wisconsin [and] Minnesota, they're pretty big buildings, and they do have their artwork, but it's mostly symbolic artwork and there is no central theme in it. The capitol in Kansas is nice. It has a splendid mural by John Steuart Curry, the famous one that has John Brown in it. But, it lacks the great diversity and the great quantity of art that we have. Plus, it's Kansas, you know. I don't really have that much against Kansas because my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents all lived out there. My great-grandparents homesteaded in Kansas when there were still Indians around. Colorado has some artwork. Its main claim to fame is that there's a step that marks 5,280 feet so that you are a mile high when you're in the capitol. I've been in Arizona's capitol. Now, Arizona came into the

Union, though, in 1912 so they're a young state. So, their original capitol is still there, but it's a museum. They have a glass and steel building behind it that is the executive building. And then, the House and the Senate have their own separate buildings on either side of a plaza that leads up to the old capitol. So, the old capitol is kind of a museum. There's a fellow in there, the last time I was out there, there's a fellow there who does a living history portrayal of Arizona's first governor, George Wylie Paul Hunt, who was from Randolph County, Missouri. He was elected seven times, and apparently, he was a real character. I've been in the California capitol. Back when Ronald Reagan was the governor of California, I was in the California capitol. It's big. It has a gold dome. But, it can't compare to Missouri in terms of the artistic excellence. I've been in Georgia's capitol. I've been in Mississippi's capitol. Kentucky's capitol. Indiana's capitol. Ohio's capitol, which doesn't have a dome, and it's really not a very distinguished capitol. Oklahoma's capitol, I've been in. So—Nebraska. Nebraska's is a big, tall office building with kind of a little gold dome sitting on top of it. But, it has some very nice mosaics inside, but it can't match us artistically. North Dakota's capitol is, I think, an office building. So, I've been in a majority of the capitols, but nothing, I don't think anything—this isn't just me saying this as a Missourian. But I have yet to see a capitol that can really match Jefferson City for its architectural elegance and its artistic excellence as I like to put it. Pennsylvania's is very nice, but it's very big. And sometimes people look at a big capitol that's nicely maintained and nicely kept and they think this is really great. Well, all capitols have at least one or two rooms that are great rooms. House and Senate chambers, mostly. But top to bottom, I've never been in a capitol that can match ours.

SEAN ROST: Well, that concludes this week's episode. Thanks for being with us, Mr. Priddy.

BOB PRIDDY: I'm glad to have done it. Thank you.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh. If you are interested in more of the people, places, culture, and history around Our Missouri, check out the following upcoming events. "Benton's Perilous Visions" is an exhibit of Thomas Hart Benton artwork from World War II that showcases the artists' interpretation of the anxiety, horror, grief, and resolve that permeated American society during the war years. This exhibit will be on display in the Main Gallery of the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center until Spring 2019. If you care about researching and preserving your family's history, the Historical Society is offering two events in mid-October that might be of interest to you. On October 16th, the Society is collaborating with the Historical Society of Maries County for a program on preserving family history at the Maries County Courthouse in Vienna. On October 18th, Katie Seale, Senior Archivist at the Society's Rolla Research Center is hosting an event on Beginning Genealogy at the Scenic River Library in Owensville. If you live in southeast Missouri, please visit the Historical Society's Cape Girardeau Research Center for its open house on October 26th. This event is a great way to familiarize yourself with the Center's materials documenting southeast Missouri history. The Cape Girardeau Research Center is located in Pacific Hall on the campus of Southeast Missouri State University. Finally, register now to attend the Center for Missouri Studies Fall Lecture at the Courtyard by Marriot in Columbia on October 13th. This year's event features Pulitzer Prize-winning author Caroline

Fraser who will talk about her recent book, *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder*. To register and learn more about these events, visit the State Historical Society of Missouri's website at shsmo.org/events.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.