

# Copy of Thomas Hart Benton papers

at all without a textual accompaniment, ~~undesirable~~<sup>undesirable</sup>, as I have said. 4 4  
Now then, if the purchase is not represented, or at least suggested, connect Jefferson with the theme? Or, and this is the crux of the problem, ~~with~~ with the movements of form which express it?

But in the case of the Lewis and Clark explorative expedition, Jefferson enters directly into the context of the theme—he makes the first step to actually open the West, <sup>involving direct physical action</sup>. This is, of course, easily representable. A series of scenes could be effected beginning with one at Washington and ending with one on the Columbia with which Jefferson's connection would be perfectly clear. Again such a series would occupy all of the mural space. It would also leave out Independence because there was no such place at the time. But as one of the main purposes of the mural is to indicate the part had by Independence in the opening of the West this ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> unthinkable. The same difficulty arises with celebrated individuals of early business enterprise—Mannuel Lian, John Jacob Astor, William Henry Ashley, etc.—important as they are to the general theme they cannot be tied to Independence.

In our preliminary discussions ~~the name~~ the name of Senator Benton came second only to Jefferson's. Fathering the survey of the Santa Fe Trail and later of Fremont's expeditions, pressing always toward western expansion, his consequential place in the theme is unquestionable. He can also be tied to an existing Independence. But, still again, problems of space and of engagement in the form of the mural come up. Also, another one of historical priority. As with the Louisiana Purchase, in the case of Jefferson, there are precedent events, "facts accomplished," <sup>at this time</sup> this time on the thematic scene proper, which operated on Benton and which provided political leverage <sup>for</sup> his views. Men were active on the Santa Fe Trail long before it was surveyed, the pathways ways of the West were exploited ~~before it was surveyed~~ long before Fremont became the Pathfinder, ~~trans-Mississippi expansion~~ trans-Mississippi expansion was occurring before Benton left Tennessee.

This is no place to discuss the "classic chicken and egg" problems of history. But they do have bearing in the cases of ~~Judson and Benton and others~~ Jefferson and ~~Ben~~ Benton and others above named on the present mural problem. These men were effective chiefly because of the ideas they entertained, promulgated, and made decisions upon. But ideas cannot be imaged-only <sup>physical existence and definition</sup> ~~concrete~~ images can suggest ideas—but only when the associations are habitual and familiar. An image of Jesus Christ immediately suggests a train of ideas and meanings. Such an image is thus meaningful in itself. This is what an image should be if it is to be effective. Images in a public mural, designed to engage public response, should show, without need of explanation, their meaning in the mural context or should, at least, permit the spectator to set up relevant meanings. Would images of the personages above discussed, images which it appears would not very well be "activated", fulfill such conditions?

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## Description

Copy of a page from the Thomas Hart Benton papers on the proposed mural for the Harry S. Truman Library. This page includes a list of technical problems, a study of the mural themes, and consideration of technical conditions with conclusions.

## Date(s)

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8x10 inches (21x26 cm) Black & White

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