



# STORIES IN MOSAIC

## The Blizzard of 1888



*“...the medium of mosaic is not painting with stones and not sculpture, but an art the essential quality of which is luminosity.”*

Jeanne Amelie Sills Reynal  
(1903-1983)

### the artist...

Jeanne Reynal, mosaic artist, was born in 1903 in White Plains, New York. Jeanne lived and studied the ancient art of stone mosaic as the assistant to Russian mosaicist Boris Anrep in Paris, France from 1930 to 1938.

Jeanne Reynal explored the beauty of surfaces with her work. Each mosaic is made up of thousands of tiles, ranging from a square inch to a pinhead in size.

Although she is considered an Abstract Expressionist, she owed her technique to a much earlier time – the gold mosaics of Byzantium – her compositions maintain a wonderful freshness and freedom.

### the story...

On January 12, 1888, a sudden fierce blizzard slashed across the Midwest. The temperature fell to between 30 and 40 degrees below zero. A howling northwest wind swept the plains. The storm raged for 12 to 18 hours and is probably the most severe single blizzard to have hit Nebraska since the settlement of the state.

Sometimes called “the school children’s storm,” the blizzard caught many children away from home. Many acts of heroism were performed by parents, teachers, and the children themselves.

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# Citizen Responsibility

## who was minnie freeman?



Minnie Freeman, a 19-year-old teacher Freeman was a teacher at a sod schoolhouse six miles south of Ord, Nebraska in an area known as Mira Valley. She linked her pupils with twine and led them through the blinding storm to safety at a farmhouse after gale winds blew off a corner of the school’s tarpaper-and-sod roof. Her acts of heroism became a legacy.



Compare these sketches with the mosaic on the front of the poster.  
Which image is most realistic? Which gives the most emotion?  
How can art be a means for us to celebrate our heroes and express ourselves and heal after following disasters?

## what do you think?

# PRESERVATION & RESTORATION MOSAICS



Each mosaic is made up of thousands of tiles, ranging from a square inch to a pinhead in size. In 2006, conservator Anne Rosenthal found herself working against time. The Californian came to Nebraska to do fine art conservation at the Capitol for about 25 years putting together the aging tiles and mortar of six mosaics in the building’s foyer.

“There are hundreds of pieces actually missing,” she said, nestled amid a jungle of scaffolding in front of “Tree Planting,” one of two Capitol mosaics made by artist Jeanne Reynal.

The image Reynal portrayed is bright and chaotic, with trees made of gold-colored tiles and a multicolored background. When the sun hits it just right, it has a glow. “This is my favorite piece,” Rosenthal said. The Reynal mosaic was the most difficult to fix. The impulsive construction of the mosaic means more pieces have

fallen off. Much mortar is rough and worn away. “(The mosaics) haven’t been really addressed since they were first installed,” Rosenthal said. That was more than 40 years ago, when they were dedicated as part of the State Centennial celebration in 1967. Since then, the works have suffered through rain leak damage, humidity, natural decay and the curious fingers of visitors to the Capitol. It took almost a month to repair all of the mosaic.

## story continued...

The story of Minnie Freeman has become symbolic of these many acts of heroism. Miss Freeman, still in her teens at the time, was teaching at a school near here. When the wind tore the roof off the sod schoolhouse, Miss Freeman saved her pupils by leading them through the storm to a farmhouse a half mile away.

Many other teachers performed similar acts of heroism, and at least one lost her life in the attempt. No accurate count of the total deaths from the storm is possible, but estimates for Nebraska have ranged from 40 to 100.



January 12, 1888 Blizzard Club  
Historical Land Mark Council,  
Nebr. 70, South of Ord

## Capitol Location Foyer