

Artist's Statement: Charles Fritz

*When the Yellowstone Kelly Interpretive Site Committee approached me about doing a painting to commemorate the completion of this important effort, I was very honored to have been considered. We visited about the elements which would be important to convey in a painting; Kelly's relationship with the Army with whom he served as an enlisted soldier and later as a scout on the Montana plains, his relationships with the native Americans of the region, and his life-long zeal for adventure. These relationships that figured so prominently in Kelly's life here in Montana are represented by the riders in the background. The committee graciously gave me a great deal of latitude as to the composition and location for the painting, but in the end, to me the best place to set this painting was from the inspiring heights of the rims overlooking the Yellowstone valley. The most dramatic rims along the entirety of the Yellowstone River, from beginning to end, are right here in Billings where every day we appreciate and live with their ever-changing moods as they tower over our city. Their color, and the region that became known for them, also inspired Kelly's admirers in the late 1800's to fondly "Tag" Luther Sage Kelly as, "Yellowstone Kelly." I placed him on a spirited horse befitting his adventurous spirit and symbolically out in front of the others, as he so often was throughout his life. I hope that the painting conveys the emotion and the message found in Yellowstone Kelly's favorite line of poetry, "Keep not standing fixed and rooted, but briskly venture, briskly roam."*