



CALIFORNIA ART CLUB NEWSLETTER

Documenting California's Traditional Arts Heritage for More Than 100 Years

Sunshine, Trains and Hollywood Bring Artists to Southern California

by Elaine Adams

FL PUEBLO DE LA REINA DE los Angeles, *The Town of the Queen of the Angels*, was founded by the Spanish colonists in 1781 and was the second pueblo created in the territory of *Las Californias*, just four years after the founding of Pueblo de San Jose in Santa Clara County. The original Los Angeles settlement consisted of eleven families, made up of eleven men, eleven women and twenty-two children who were of Mulatto, Criollo, and African descent. They were recruited from Mexico's Sonora y Sinaloa Province to populate the 17,000-acre ranchland with the goal of securing the territory for the Spanish Empire.

Spain's strategy to colonize consisted of three parts: religious, military, and civil. The religious and military phases occurred concurrently and involved the establishment of Catholic missions to cultivate the native Indians who also worked as labourers, while at the same time presidios were built to house the military guard. The third stage was the development of civil towns referred to as "pueblos" that were structured as cooperative farming communities.

In 1821 Mexico became independent from Spain. *Californios* were now free to exercise their new-found legal rights as Mexican citizens, which included acquiring land. Agriculture and cattle ranching became the dominant industries. Prior to 1824, the year Mexico relaxed their trade rules, California

averaged less than three merchant ships per year with thirteen years showing no arrival of ships at all. As California became significant traders of cattle hide and tallow (fat used in the making of soap and candles), the average number

of ships that docked the ports from 1825 to 1845 increased to twenty-five per year. The *Californio* aristocrats and their hired *vaqueros* (cowboys) established the most successful cowhide and tallow industry in North America and provided exports



Louis L. Betts (1873–1961)
Mid-Winter, Coronado Beach, c. 1907
Oil on canvas 29" × 24"
(Painted for the Santa Fe Railroad Collection)
Collection of The Irvine Museum



Alexander Francis Harmer (1856–1925)

Chinatown, Los Angeles, 1886

Oil on canvas 19" × 30"

Collection of The Irvine Museum

Note: The road depicted here is now known as Los Angeles Street. Behind the building on the left centre is the old firehouse tower (with a flag). The large brick building on the distant left is the Pico House Hotel, both of which are on present-day Olvera Street.

from various trading ports including with merchant ships from Boston and Britain.

In 1835 the Mexican Congress declared Los Angeles the capital of Alta California. During this time the economy and population of Los Angeles increased to approximately 1,500. Then in 1846 the Mexican-American War erupted, and after fighting a number of battles the war culminated with the 1848 signing of **The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** and ceded California to the United States.

Los Angeles Gets Connected

THE COMPLETION OF THE FIRST Transcontinental Railroad on November 6, 1869 connected the east to the west through a network of tracks that linked the **Union Pacific Railroad** to the **Central Pacific Railroad of California** from Omaha to Sacramento. In 1883 the **Southern Pacific Railroad**, jointly owned by **Collis P. Huntington**, **Leland Stanford**, **Mark Hopkins**, and **Charles Crocker** with their initial investments of \$1,500 each, connected New Orleans to Los Angeles. Two years later the Central Pacific and the Southern Pacific merged. It's evident



A 1909 Santa Fe Railroad advertisement showing the artist Thomas Moran with his Grand Canyon sketchbook.

that one-hundred years after the initial eleven families settled in Los Angeles, the pueblo had developed into a sizeable town of more than 11,000, and began its exponential growth.

The Southern Pacific made travel to the West more accessible and much safer—and helped glamorize California

from its “Wild West” image to the glories of “The Land of Milk and Honey.” To boost tourism and business, in 1898 the **Southern Pacific Transportation Company** launched a passenger magazine called, *Sunset*, named after the railroad’s premier train “The Sunset Limited” that travelled on the “Sunset Route.” The publication was inaugurated with a photo-filled feature story about Yosemite. The marketing campaign was successful, and California tourism grew. Many visitors decided to stay and buy land, and as the Southern Pacific was the biggest landowner in California, the four partners profited very well.

Marketing the West

AT THE TURN-OF-THE-TWENTIETH-century the **Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad** sparked the easterner’s imagination through art. Artists were commissioned to portray picturesque, and perhaps slightly romanticized, images of the West including scenes of the Grand Canyon, Mojave Desert, Petrified Forest, pueblos, and Native Indians. Paintings were reproduced on train folders, calendars, travel brochures, and dining menus. The original works were displayed at train stations and ticket windows. In payment for their paintings, artists were generally given rail passage, which many gladly applied towards moving out West.

As separate railways began connecting to the Transcontinental, the competition to attract tourists became fierce. Several railroads, including the AT&SF, Southern Pacific, **Denver and Rio Grande**, **Great Northern**, and **Northern Pacific**, launched campaigns to promote their routes by commissioning artists to paint the “New Paradise.” Colour photography was non-existent, but colourful paintings provided the scenic window to the wonders of the West.

Artist **Thomas Moran (1837–1926)** gained celebrity status for documenting Yellowstone in watercolours created during an 1871 expedition. In fact these paintings played an important role in establishing Yellowstone as the first national park. In 1872 during a debate in Washington D.C., executives of the Northern Pacific Railroad pushed for land preservation. In 1873 Moran accompanied **Major John Wesley**

Powell on a survey expedition to the Grand Canyon. The paintings he produced from this trip further inspired the nation's lure of the West.

In 1892, capitalizing on Moran's success, the ATSF funded the artist to return to the Grand Canyon to create new paintings from which they would select one and receive all reproduction rights to use in their advertising campaign. Thousands of lithograph prints of Moran's *Grand Canyon* in gilt-frames were produced and distributed to homes, schools, offices, and hotels in the east. There was no mention of the ATSF on the prints, but the message was clear: in order to travel to the Southwest, one had to travel by way of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe.

In 1895 the ATSF created an advertising department and named **William Haskell Simpson** as its first chief. Recognizing the success of the Moran campaign, Simpson began organizing annual painting expeditions that would last three to four weeks at a time and invited popular painters to tour the company's lines in New Mexico, Arizona, and California for subjects to paint for the railways. This advertising

success could not be ignored by the other railroads. Among the slate of artists who painted for the various railroad companies were luminaries **Oscar E. Berninghaus (1874–1952)**, **Louis L. Betts (1873–1961)**, **Ernest Blumenschein (1874–1960)**, **E.I. Couse (1866–1936)**, **Maynard Dixon (1875–1946)**, **Henry Farny (1847–1916)**, **John Bond Francisco (1863–1931)**, **George Innes, Jr. (1854–1926)**, **Fernand H. Lungren (1857–1932)**, **Bert Greer Phillips (1868–1956)**, **Edward Henry Potthast (1857–1927)**, **Joseph Henry Sharp (1859–1953)**, and **Gunnar Widforss (1879–1934)**.

The Indian portrait painter **Louis Benton Akin (1868–1913)** was invited to paint the Hopi in Arizona. In 1906 Simpson invited **William R. Leigh (1866–1955)** for his first visit to the West, which resulted in launching Leigh's career as the painter of cowboy-life and frontier scenes, gaining him the moniker of "Sagebrush Rembrandt." Food and lodging for the artists were provided by the **Fred Harvey Company** with their chain of hotels and restaurants located at major railroad stations.

The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was instrumental in promoting



Edgar Payne (1883–1947)
Canyon de Chelly at Sunset, 1916
Oil on canvas 26" × 32"

Provenance: Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad
Collection of Leland Stanford Mansion Museum



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many artists' careers, including that of **Edgar Payne's (1883–1947)**. Around 1916 Payne was commissioned by the ATSF to paint the Southwest. He and his wife, artist **Elsie Palmer Payne (1884–1971)**, had recently moved to Santa Barbara from Chicago, and decided to accept the commission. They travelled together with their three-year-old daughter, **Evelyn**, to Canyon de Chelly where Payne spent four months painting views of the towering spires and cliff walls.

Under William H. Simpson the ATSF's art acquisitions grew from three paintings in 1905 to 108 paintings in 1907, and finally, developed into an impressive collection of 262 paintings in ten years, becoming the first corporate art collection in the United States. The arrival of the railroads not only benefited southern California economically by attracting Midwesterners and Easterners who were eager for expansive land and warmer climes, but it also spurred the growth of an art community. By 1900 Los Angeles mushroomed to a population of 102,479, including several hundred artists.

Sunshine and Citrus Nurture California's Economy

THE AVAILABILITY OF LONG-distance rail sparked an explosion in the agricultural industry. Suddenly, fallow land could be cultivated for a profit, as its crops could travel to far-off markets in a shorter period of time. Southern California's meridian shares the same latitude with that of the sunny Mediterranean, thus presenting the ideal climate for growing superior citrus. Trains departing from California for eastern destinations were packed with produce in simple wooden crates. As demand for California citrus became especially competitive, packing crates began displaying eye-catching promotional labels to attract the most buyers. Again, artists were assembled to create captivating images to help boost commerce.

The crate label industry was made up of teams of designers and artists, who worked together to produce these enticing, vivid images that graced the

wooden crates carrying fruits and produce. However, the artists' names were rarely documented. Many were German immigrants who came to New York and Chicago to study commercial art, and then, headed for California to work for one of the hundreds of label printing houses. Two of the giants among label producers were **Schmidt Litho** in San Francisco and **Western Lithograph** in Los Angeles; each employed approximately 100 artists who worked anonymously.

The "Master of Moonlight," **Frank Tenney Johnson (1874–1939)**, created several original oil paintings and sold them with their copyrights to Western Lithograph. One of Johnson's classic cowboy scenes was reproduced for the **Summit Brand** orange label (the graphic lettering was done by another artist, perhaps **Dario DeJulio (1916–?)**).

In 1918 the California-born marine artist **Joe Duncan Gleason (1881–1959)** was commissioned to create four orange crate labels printed by Western Lithograph for the **Anaheim Orange and Lemon Association**, most likely of Clipper Ships. His earnings were used to take his new wife on their honeymoon.

From 1895 to 1905 the German-born western artist **Herman Wendelborg Hansen (1854–1924)** created original paintings for at least ten crate labels printed by the San Francisco based **H.S. Crocker Lithograph Company**. Hansen was also one of the earliest artists commissioned by the railroads, specifically **Northwestern Railroad Company** in 1879, to create scenes of the Old West. His most famous image was *The Pony Express*, created in 1900. His son, **Armin C. Hansen (1886–1957)**, became a nationally renowned artist, recognized primarily for his scenes of Monterey's fishing industry.

Hollywood

THE TURN-OF-THE-TWENTIETH-century introduced a new visual art form—that of moviemaking. In 1891, while working at the **Thomas A. Edison Company**, chief engineer **William Kennedy Laurie Dickson** developed the Kinetograph, a fully-working moving picture camera that created a sequence of images on celluloid strip. The images were viewed from a cabinet



Frank Tenney Johnson (1874–1939)
Summit Brand Orange Crate Label
Lithograph
Private Collection



Charlie Chaplin giving acting direction in sign language to Granville Redmond on the set of *A Dog's Life* (1918).
Courtesy of The Irvine Museum, In Memory of Mildred Albronda



Actor Douglas Fairbanks and director Albert Parker consulting with art director Carl Oscar Borg during the filming of *The Black Pirate* in 1925.

called the “Kinetoscope” that rolled a fifty-foot continuous loop of celluloid film backlit by an incandescent lamp and generated by an electric motor. The film was viewed through a peephole with a magnifying lens that allowed only one person at a time to watch. The Kinetoscope was exhibited for the first time at the 1893 **Chicago World's Fair**.

The **Black Maria Studio** (pronounced “ma-RYE-ah”) was established in 1893 as America's first movie studio and was located on the grounds of Thomas Edison's laboratories in West Orange, New Jersey. Two years later, Dickson left the Edison Company and launched his own successful film production operation called the **American Mutoscope Company** originally located on a rooftop on Broadway in New York City.

In 1896 when the English émigré **J. Stuart Blackton** received an assignment from the *New York Evening World* to interview Thomas Edison about the Kinetoscope, Blackton was so inspired that he bought one of the devices, and the following year, went into direct competition by founding the **American Vitagraph Company**. The company began making short films from their first studio located on a rooftop in Manhattan, and later on a rooftop in Brooklyn. To capture natural sunlight, many of the early studios were built on rooftops. Thus the moviemaking industry was born on the east coast.

Although electric lights were

available and commonly used in moviemaking, the best light source was natural sunlight. East Coast winter conditions, however, posed a challenge in controlling light and limited outdoor filming. With the recent flood of promotional material sponsored chiefly by the railroad industry, travel to the wide open vistas and sunny climes of southern California became enticing to the growing movie industry. The combined marketing efforts of the railroad and agricultural industries resulted in creating one of U.S. history's most successful relocation campaigns—a campaign that was accomplished through works of art.

In January of 1910 Biograph's film director **D.W. Griffith** travelled to Los Angeles along with his studio actors to shoot the film *Ramona* on location. They set up a temporary studio at Washington Street and Grand Avenue (now the location of the Los Angeles Convention Center). The crew heard about a friendly small village with beautiful floral scenery just north of them called “Hollywood.” They loved the location and made the first film in Hollywood called *In Old California* about the days of the early *Californios*. Within the year, fifteen other independent East Coast film companies moved to the area. Early Hollywood demographics were made up of ranchers, citrus growers, and sheep herders. In 1912 Vitagraph purchased a twenty-nine acre sheep

ranch on Prospect Street (later changed to Hollywood Boulevard) in Hollywood.

Film-making grew into a large-scale industry that required dozens, even hundreds, of talented people, including visual artists. As the railroad and citrus industries already attracted artists to southern California, many were readily available to work in the new visual medium of film. Moviemaking also sparked excitement in its visual possibilities attracting new artists to the area, including the Philadelphia-born **Granville Redmond (1871–1935)**.

At the age of two and a half, Redmond contracted scarlet fever and was left permanently deaf and mute. In 1874 his family moved to northern California, where Redmond went to a Berkeley school for the deaf. An excellent student, he received a stipend from the Institute to travel to Paris in 1893, where he enrolled in the **Académie Julian**, and spent the next five years studying art under **William Bouguereau (1825–1901)**.

In 1917 Redmond moved to Los Angeles with the intent of auditioning for the movies. He felt that his natural skills as a pantomimist would make him an ideal actor for the silent pictures. **Charlie Chaplin** auditioned him and the two became good friends. Indeed, Chaplin cast Redmond in eight small acting roles from 1919 to 1931, including *A Dog's Life* (1918), in which Redmond plays a dance hall proprietor, and *City Lights* (1931), in which he plays a sculptor.



Granville Redmond (1871–1935)
Hazy Day in the Antelope Valley
 Oil on canvas 20" × 25"
 Private Collection
 Courtesy of The Irvine Museum

Chaplin also gave Redmond a bungalow on his movie lot to set up a painting studio. From here he was able to focus on his successful paintings of colourful poppy fields and wildflowers carpeting California's rolling hills. Occasionally, Redmond suffered from bouts of depression, during which time he would paint moody, introspective scenes in the style of the northern California *tonalists*.

Landscape artist **Hanson Puthuff** (1875–1972) moved from Denver to Los Angeles in 1903 and worked as a scene painter for film and theatre productions. He also began to paint easel works. His first exhibition was held in 1905, and prompted the *Los Angeles Times* art critic **Antony Anderson** to give him a positive review. Puthuff and Anderson became good friends, and together founded the **Art Students League of Los Angeles**.

From 1926 to 1929 western artist **Carl Oscar Borg** (1879–1947) was involved in moviemaking as Art Director of seven films working with some of the biggest stars, including **Douglas Fairbanks**, **Ronald Colman**, and **Gary Cooper**. Impressionist **Arthur Grover Rider**

(1886–1975) was introduced to filmmaking and worked as a scenic artist in the 1939 blockbuster feature, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Joe Duncan Gleason settled in a hillside studio located in San Pedro from where he had a panoramic view of the Los Angeles harbor to the south. Gleason's knowledge of illustrating sailing vessels provided him work in the citrus label industry and attracted commissions to paint private yachts. His knowledge of illustrating ships also garnered him steady work in the motion pictures industry. In the mid-1920s he assisted **Cecil B. DeMille** in the production of *Yankee Clipper* (released in 1927) and in **Warner Bros.** *Captain Blood* (1935) starring **Errol Flynn**. With Mr. Flynn, Gleason also worked on *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), and *Dodge City* (1939). Other major movies with which he was involved include *Anthony Adverse* (1936) starring **Frederic March** and **Olivia de Havilland**, and *Petrified Forest* (1936) starring **Leslie Howard**, **Humphrey Bogart** and **Bette Davis**, and *The Yearling* (1946), starring

Gregory Peck and Jane Wyman.

The history of Los Angeles is a unique one—one that was built by pioneers, promoters, adventurers, and visionaries—and one that recognized the value of art and artists. The imagination and power of artists are not to be underestimated in the scheme of history and in our cultural identity. ■

Notes:

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Sources for this article include: California Light, A Century of Landscapes: Painting of the California Art Club, published by Skira-Rizzoli, New York City, 2011; **Jean Stern**, Executive Director of **The Irvine Museum**; **Gordon T. McClelland**, author of several publications regarding California art and the citrus crate label industry; **Carol Raymond**, author of Santa Fe Southern Railway; **Joni L. Kinsey's** essay in the book, *The Majesty of the Grand Canyon, 150 Years in Art*; **Patricia Broder**, author of *The American West: The Modern Vision*; **Sandra D'Emilio** and **Suzan Campbell's** work in the book, *Visions and Visionaries: The Art and Artists of the Santa Fe Railway*.



Joe Duncan Gleason (1881–1959)
Chinese Junk Ning-Po in Catalina Harbour
 Oil on board 12" × 10"
 Private Collection
 Courtesy of mutualart.com