

Chapter 1 - C. S. PRICE, MY ARTIST UNCLE

by Frances Price Cook, Portland, Oregon

C. S. Price is admired today for a variety of reasons: his approach to nature, animals and people; his use of colors and the way he applied them; and the individual, sometimes ethereal quality of his art. But my Uncle Clate, as I knew him, disclaimed any magic or mystique. He knew his talent was

God given.



C. S. Price in Portland, Oregon studio, 1949

He lost no opportunity to study nature around him, even to sitting on the back porch on a summer evening with the family, and half closing his eyes to see the relationships of the colors all were admiring.

Uncle Clate was always

welcome in the homes of his brothers and sisters, and therefore shared a rich experience of family love. Wherever he was, he always sought to pay his way with some form of practical good. To his nieces and nephews, he was a fun person to have around. We were fond of our artist uncle.

Heritage, incidents that Uncle Clate knew about, times of solitude, shared experiences - all these helped to formulate his personal philosophy. This philosophy was based on his awareness and appreciation of the one big thing, which many people define as God.

He was born on the family farm near Bedford, Iowa on May 11, 1874. In his early years he showed a talent for carving, and as eldest son, he made toys for the children coming along. His mother, Kaleida Kitchell Baker Price, had been educated in liberal arts, so it was only natural for her to encourage Clayton to use his artistic talents.



Carvings & drawing by 7 year old C. S. Price

His father, John Wesley Price, was of pioneer stock and carried on the tradition by moving his family to new frontiers. In 1886 he reasoned that twelve years of age was the right time for Clayton to assume the responsibilities of a man.

John W. chose for his growing family a location on the Sheridan side of the Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming Territory. In four different years he had accompanied other pioneer families as they drove cattle from Iowa.

For the fifth trip he brought Clydesdale horses to introduce to the region and arranged to have his own family come by train to Custer, Montana, where he met Kaleida and their children, Gertrude, Clayton, Ota, Arch, Floyd, Will, and Edith.

In taking them by wagon to their new home, he drove through areas that had been Custer battlefields only ten years earlier.

As the family was traveling south by wagon toward the territory of Wyoming, all of a sudden they were completely surrounded by Indians on horses.

The Indians began pointing toward the youngest child, Edith, and made it known they wanted to hold the baby. When the Indians were given the baby to hold they suddenly rode off, taking the baby with them. The Price family did not know what to do except continue south, not able to pursue the Indians. After a little while the Indians



The Father of the Artist, 1908, Graphite on paper, Portland Art Museum, Oregon, Gift of Mr. Maurice A. Price, PAM 57.7

returned with their wives and the baby. Everyone was all smiles in handing the baby back; this was the first white baby they had ever seen.

In addition to those who came out from Iowa, four more children were to be

born in Wyoming, Ernest, Clarence and Maurice. The family had lost one child born in Iowa and later were to lose the last one, born after Maurice.

Clayton was his father's big asset as he learned the practicalities of homesteading. Included was the necessity to ride at night with weapons to protect the women and the younger children at home.

Within a few years the Price family moved north to the Banner Ranch which housed the post office.

One night neighbors from miles around brought their women and children to the Banner Ranch for protection as there were rumors of an Indian movement. The men and older boys, including Uncle Clate, rode out to guard. Of these John W. was the calmest, as he believed there was no basis for the rumors, as it proved to be.



Price Family, 1899 (in back row are C. S. Price, Will Price and Archie Price (Father of Frances Price))

Kaleida ran the post office, and John W. kept changes of horses for the stage coaches. At each arrival time the boys ran out to help with the horses, the girls to help with women passengers.

Farther out on a main road, heavier freight was hauled by teams of oxen, six or eight. The Price boys liked to watch the change of teams which was accomplished with much cussing by the ox skimmers. Kaleida did not like her boys to be around that activity as she was afraid they would pick up the language. But their dad never swore, and the boys did not pick it up.

Even though the Price family was too distant from an organized church, there was a pattern of religious devotion carried on in their home. John W.'s father was a minister.

Kaleida's father read the Bible in its original language and had stressed going to the source of Christianity for guidance. This philosophy is seen as a foundation for Uncle Clate all his life. There was also built, by family example, a respect for all peoples.

John W. had brought the first strain of large draft horses into the counties east of the Big Horn Mountains and became known as an expert with animals.

One harvest time when John W. had a lot of oats for sale in sacks, he sent word to the Crow Reservation. Many Indian families came and bought, then camped a short ways down the road. For a gift of a barrel of sugar, they put on a war dance show that evening, attended by the Prices and neighbors from miles around. The audience chipped in and gave the Indians a beef for a feast.

Many years later I heard Dr. Lloyd Reynolds of Reed College say at the Portland Art Museum that C. S. Price painted Indians like human beings instead of the stereotyped warrior images as they were often portrayed. Clayton certainly knew them as real people.

John W. knew some Indian language. On occasion he did horse trading in that tongue. It is Indians that Uncle Clate knew as real people that are seen in his paintings.

A measure of comfort was achieved at the Banner Ranch with hired help in the fields and in the home. Wyoming emerged as a state in 1890. During those years John W. had been helping to build a road over the Big Horn Mountains into the sparsely settled Big Horn Basin. By 1892 John W. purchased land on Shell Creek, just as it flows west out of the mountains, and moved his family to this newer frontier.

The land is beautiful with its sheer sided canyons of pink sandstone, hills of purple, yellow, white and red from outcropping minerals. We see these colors of the Wyoming hills in Uncle Clate's paintings done decades later.

To take care of his family, John W. planned a return trip to Sheridan for winter provisions after the move. But an early snow closed the road and kept him away from his family until spring. Kaleida and her children lived in a small cabin on a meager existence that winter. Clayton was eighteen; he had to help the family survive during rugged conditions.

In the spring Clayton started improving his own homestead along with helping his dad. He proved up (qualified for) his homestead in five years, and he was a land owner at the age of 23. He became chief carpenter in designing and helping to build structures to prove up the homesteads. Some of those buildings are still standing because of his expert workmanship.

From fresh cut timber Clayton made tables, chairs, beds, chests and cupboards. Meanwhile Kaleida sewed, knitted, cooked, baked and canned along with teaching the girls how to take care of a home. Appreciative of these efforts, Clayton did all he could to lighten his mother's load. In addition to caring for the home, Kaleida did home schooling because there was not yet a school in Shell, Wyoming.

John W. and his sons brought water from Shell Creek using wooden flumes across uneven terrain. One of these flumes was still in operation



C. S. Price as a young man

100 years later when it was shown to the family at a reunion. In addition, the family had pride in their lands because Clayton plowed his furrows accurately and straight.

The health of Kaleida was not good in her last few years. (She passed away in 1903). Clayton sensed her need for help and aided her with heavy chores like baking with a whole sack of flour each week. He invented a mechanical device for washing clothes which he patented and later sold the patent.

Although the tradition was lacking in some of the pioneers, the Price family had a pattern of religious devotion within the home. Both John W. and Kaleida leaned toward education and helped start the first school where their daughter, Ota, taught.

The Smith family had homesteaded ahead of the Price family. Within a few years Ota married Ed Smith and started raising their family of six boys.

Gertrude just about broke her father's heart when she married and went off to Montana. But when John W. got word that Gertrude had become a widow with three small children, he drove a team

of horses with a wagon to bring them all back to the Price home.

After Clayton proved up his homestead with the required buildings, and the acres of land under cultivation, he let it become part of the family holding. He sometimes worked for other ranchers as a cowboy or

cook when he wanted money for a special purchase. When cooking, he used spare time to draw pictures.

On one occasion a tall, long armed, long legged rider was thrown from his horse and went flying through the air. As he picked himself up he remarked to the other cowboys "I'm sure glad Price didn't see this." That was all that was needed for one of them to ride off and tell the artist who knew both the rider and his mount; he promptly produced a sketch.

Forty dollars a month plus room and board slowly grew into an amount large enough to buy an individually designed saddle. Clayton had two saddlebags, one especially for drawings as he always carried sketching materials with him. He drew as he thought he should, with painstaking detail.

There was no loneliness for him. Even familiar scenes in new light or in darkness presented ideas to ponder. One winter he spent in a cabin by himself, with books, where he drew and practiced calligraphy.

As the Big Horn Basin became more populated the town of Shell sprang up. For many of the local people the saloon was the gathering place — Clayton was no stranger there.

He was observant of other customers whom he sketched after they left. The bartender was so pleased with these recognizable drawings that he tacked them up on his walls.

Clayton was an active participant in the gambling of the times, apparently doing quite well. One

day he had a talk with his mother, which ended in the burning of his deck of cards.

These men lived hard and played hard. There was a lodge meeting that is still talked about. A fellow pioneer about to be initiated had been



C. S. Price drawing of Practical Joke

frisked to be sure he was not going into the meeting room with any weapons, and then he was blindfolded.

Unbeknownst to those who escorted him into the room, the initiate had a gun stuck down the side of his boot. When he got into the gathering, he pulled out the gun and started shooting at random. The gun was loaded only with blanks but effectively scared everyone as they made a sting where they hit. The members went out the windows, under the table, chairs and the stove. I am told it was my father who went under the stove.

Clayton was not there but soon heard the hilarious accounts. He knew everyone so well he sketched the scene and each fleeing person was identifiable. The community enjoyed this escape which became well publicized when a merchant had the drawing printed on his order of calendars. It was also printed in the newspaper.

While sketching was the quick way to record incidents, Uncle Clate turned to the natural colors of the hills all around him as a means of depicting scenery. He called his palette "earth colors" because he took the soil naturally colored by minerals to mix with turpentine and oil to make a paint. In the same manner he made his red from a brick shaved finely into a powder.

Ordinary things set him to thinking deeply. Clayton saw each springtime where in a generally dry grass area, some plots of grass came up green. In the middle of these, he saw bones of an animal which had perished the season be-

fore. He reasoned that death is not only an end, it is also a beginning. This scene stayed with him to become a fundamental basis of his deep personal philosophy.

Many years later this scene appeared on the easel. An acquaintance who looked at the canvas was moved to his own observation with a poem about the futility of life. When Uncle Clate saw the poem, he realized his own feeling was misinterpreted. Soon that scene no longer existed on canvas. It was scraped off and overlaid with another painting.



C. S. Price, ca. 1908

Not far from the Shell Creek area was a military base. Some of the men stationed there learned to like this new West and established ranches of their own.

One of the men stationed at the

military base, Colonel Jay L. Torrey, saw art works of Clayton Price in the community and was impressed. He sought out their creator and offered financing for him to go to the St. Louis School of Fine Arts with the stipulation that if Clayton did not make good, he need not repay the money.

Clayton was already a successful homesteader and rancher, a sometimes cowboy and cook for other "outfits". However, he gave this up and went to the art school in 1906. He plunged into assignments of both day and evening school. At the end of the year he was awarded recognition as the student who had made the most progress.

One of the students at the school was a niece of Charlie Russell (an already well known Western artist). She introduced Clayton to her uncle. Each admired the other's art, but Russell commented: "I am an illustrator; you are an artist."

The year at art school was an intensification of the kind of drawing Clayton was already doing.

He felt another year would not mean as much, so he returned to the ranch, got a job, and repaid his benefactor.

While Clayton was away, his father, John W. Price, was continuing in his pioneering ways. As soon as a son reached eighteen, he would file for homestead land. However, in the years since the Price family had moved to Wyoming, most of the land had gone into private hands.



C. S. Price and Charlie Russell

Land was wealth in the eyes of John Wesley Price. He heard about the virgin prairies in Alberta where settlers were buying land from the railroad, but soon there would be land open for homesteading. So, he made his plans to go north.

The cattle the family owned could bring worthwhile prices at sale in Wyoming, but his special breed of horses would be worth more in Canada just as they had been when he introduced them on both sides of the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming. Therefore, the horses would go north with the family. Their lands were sold and provisions packed.

All the neighbors gathered at the school to see the Price family off on March 12, 1908. With their father were Clayton, Floyd, Will, Ernest, Clarence and Maurice. Floyd also had his wife, Myrtle, with their daughters, Kaleida and Hattie, ages five and three. Will had his wife, Nettie.

On March 12, 1908 the Price caravan started North to Alberta. It was made up of three sheep wagons, with two of them outfitted like the fore-runner of the camper truck of today. The other wagon housed the single men and carried bulk supplies and drinking water. They left in March before school was finished so they could cross

rivers to the north while they were still frozen. Uncle Maurice wished he could have finished high school instead.

There were sometimes no roads for the course that lay ahead. The railroad was a guide part of the way, and on other parts they just went where they thought they should go.

Inadvertently, they moved north into Saskatchewan, only to be told by the Canadian Mounted Police they would have to return to the border and have the horses vaccinated. This procedure took about three weeks at the border.

While the horses were herded, the family camped at Willow Creek, the official point of entry. Evenings brought forth impromptu musicals as all the boys played some instrument. Clayton had hand made his violin from the same kind of wood they used for making their wagons. Later, he recalled that he could really "bow" those western tunes.

As the family moved north into Alberta they found the plains to be luxuriant. The virgin prairie was softer than any carpet man could imagine.

A town in Alberta named Olds provided a respite as the grazing was excellent and the scenery superb, with the Canadian Rockies looming up to the west.

A move of about fifty miles to the east brought the family to the pretty country of the Red Deer River Flats. They camped alongside the river from June 12 to sometime in August until more land was opened for homesteads.

Almost seventy years later as we stood by the road overlooking their campsite, Kaleida and Hattie, who as children had made the trip with their parents, described to me the wonderful virgin prairie as it used to be. As little girls they had

gone out barefoot with their pails to get berries for their mother.

The girls' parents, Floyd and Myrtle, chose land a little distance away, but John W., Will, Ern, and Clarence filed for lands near there. Maurice was going to have to wait until the following February when he would be eighteen and able to file for his land.

Protection for the cold winter ahead was of first importance. As John W. had learned how in his young days, they made a house of sod and a long sod shelter for their horses.

Clayton gave his dad and his brothers expert help, but he did not file for homestead land. He had made a decision. He could not be tied down

to the land again. He was likely remembering his earlier experiences, the time and effort required to prove up a homestead. He made the decision to pursue art. He stayed with the family in Canada helping them build the sod barn for the 100 horses, and then the sod house for the family.



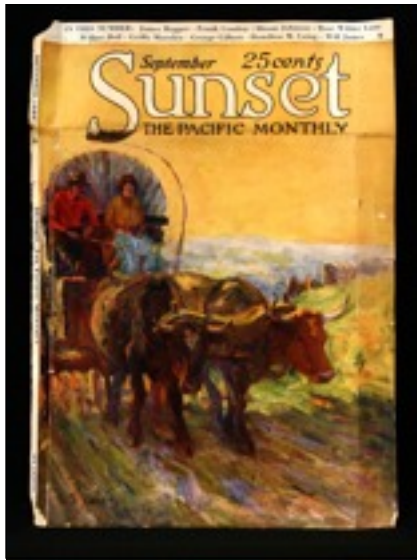
Price Family camp at the Red Deer River, Alberta, Canada, 1908

After that was accomplished, Uncle Clate moved to Calgary where he made connections with *Pacific Monthly* magazine and started illustrating for it.

"Why did your artist uncle never marry?" is a question I have been asked. I put this question one time to Uncle Maurice. He told me "Clate recognized the responsibilities of marriage and family. He felt his life as an artist would not be in the best interest of more than himself."

Uncle Clate returned on visits to help build houses of wood and to make furniture. Structures are still standing that he helped his father build. Outdoors he built a stairway for inside the house and moved it inside into place where it fit

perfectly. The family living there said it still does not have a squeak in it.



In 1909 Clayton spent a busy summer helping his family. In the fall he journeyed to Portland, Oregon and took a room with his brother, Arch, within walking distance of the offices of the

Pacific Monthly magazine.

A friend from Alberta saw illustrations Clayton was doing and wrote to him in care of the magazine. Replying, Clayton said that when they gave him a story to illustrate, he looked through it for a horse. If there were none, he was not much interested.

Summer time during 1912 found Clayton back up in Alberta helping the folks. Part of the time he became a cook for a team of archeologists who were digging near the Red Deer River for dinosaur bones. There, the artist had time to sit in the sunshine on the river bank and sketch.

Clayton's brother, Arch, was married in Wyoming in the fall of 1910 and returned to Portland.

Clayton spent the winters of 1910, 1911 and 1912 in Arch's home and summers up north helping the family.

Although he became familiar with the tree covered hills of Oregon, Uncle Clate's art continued to have a background of scenes from Wyoming and Alberta. Up north where he was also welcome in the homes of his brothers and sisters, he liked the long days and evenings of colorful sunsets. The night sky was illuminated with northern lights.

One evening as they were enjoying a sunset, some of the nieces saw their uncle sitting on the back steps with his eyes partly closed, and they started to tease him. Patiently he explained that in that manner he saw colors in a more intense relationship, and he was studying the values that nature had put together.

Edith's daughters, Inez, Ednes and Nina had great fun with their Uncle Clate. Especially, they liked to tag along when he went for walks. Nina took paper and pencil with her to try to sketch. They liked to watch him carve, and he seemed able to see his finished product inside the piece of wood he selected.

In 1913 there was an art show at the Armory in New York which showed the changes taking place in European art. Modernism was in the air. There was a fermentation of art concepts extend-

ing its influence into the western world.

It was that same year, I believe, that Uncle Clate saw this newer style of art at the Portland Art Museum. These paintings had been shown at the Armory Show and included the controversial *Nude Descending A Staircase* by Marcel Duchamp. It was painted in a more abstract way than anything Uncle Clate had probably

seen up until then. He was quoted as saying as he walked out of the exhibit, "If that is art, I don't know anything about art." More of this type of art



L to R: C. S. Price, Frances Price, Edith Price, Ernest Price, 1931