

Chapter 9 - C. S. PRICE, HIS BENEFACTORS

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At what point does a pas-time become a passion? What forces are at work to change a hobby to a calling? It is a rare individual who finds such impetus entirely from within, self-directed and self-motivated. True, the desire, the talent, and the will to excel must exist for greatness to emerge, and it is ultimately up to the individual whether he succeeds or fails. But such success rarely occurs in a vacuum.

For C. S. Price, there were clearly key benefactors who helped him to turn his casual sketching into a passion over the course of his life; people who believed in him, recognized his talent, and awarded him with support, financial and emotional, that enabled him to become C. S. Price, the artist.

His path from a pioneer and homesteader to an artist of national acclaim was neither easy nor direct. But from the moment his artistic bent appeared when he was still a young child, his mother, Kaleida Kitchell Baker Price, encouraged her son to develop his artistic talents.

Kaleida was educated in the liberal arts, and she instilled her love of art, literature and music in all her twelve children. They were all well-read and learned to play musical instruments. But Clayton, her first son, was special. She made sure he always had paper and pencils, and suggested he pack them with him when he went out on the range on horseback so he could draw every day, whenever the spirit moved him.

And draw he did. Sketching the world around him caused him to really study his surroundings, looking closely at details. His early draw-



Kaleida Kitchell Baker Price (1850-1903),
Mother of C. S. Price

ings of animals and landscapes are accurate down to the smallest detail.

As time went by, he began to see beyond the pure form of things. He received local acclaim as a talented caricaturist, capturing the characteristics of his subjects in recognizable ways. Drawing and sketching was a way to entertain himself and his family, friends and acquaintances. He was really good at it.

It was this particular talent that attracted the attention of the man who would change the course of his life.

Colonel Jay L. Torrey (1852-1920) saw Clayton's sketches of local people at the saloon in Shell, Wyoming and was quite impressed. He approached Price with a unique offer. He proposed to

pay for Price, who was around 32 at the time, to attend the School of Fine Arts in St. Louis and develop his skills as an artist. "If you don't make it as an artist, Price, you don't have to pay me back," Torrey reportedly said.

In response to this amazing display of generosity, Clayton stopped his work as a rancher and homesteader, and went to art school in 1906, and Colonel Torrey paid his way. This experience forever changed Price's life, introducing him to the world of painting and fine art. For the first time, Price believed he could and should make a profession of painting.

He attended classes and then returned to Wyoming and took jobs to earn money to repay Colonel Torrey. But things were different after that year in art school. He was no longer a ranch hand who could draw. Instead, he was an artist with a

debt of gratitude to repay. And C. S. Price never again abandoned his pursuit of being an artist.

We pay tribute to the vision and generosity of Colonel Jay L. Torrey. No other individual had such a profound impact on the life and works of C. S. Price. Torrey is referred to as a self-made man, but one cannot help but believe that somewhere in his past, someone saw his potential and sponsored his dreams, just as he had done for Price. We are filled with sincere appreciation to Colonel Torrey for being such a generous benefactor to C. S. Price even before anyone knew how great he would someday become.



Colonel Jay L. Torrey (1852-1920), Picture from his family archive, University of Wyoming, AH100891

There were others who provided support to Price over the course of his career as an artist. Some provided encouragement and direction, others provided much needed financial support when times were tough.

Painter, etcher, muralist and sculptor, Gottardo Fidele Piazzoni (1872 - 1945) was a prominent figure in the art world of Northern California in the early 20th century. In the 1930s he summarized his artistic beliefs: "I have devoted my life to a study of landscape ... not to a copy of the natu-

ral scene, but to an expression of what it means to me. I am concerned not with the external aspect of the landscape, but with its inward life." Piazzoni was as a mentor to Price soon after he arrived in San Francisco in 1915. Piazzoni encouraged Price to paint and experiment, and keep painting no matter how frustrated he may have sometimes felt. It was just the guidance Price needed after his artistic awakening at the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition.

Armin Hansen, who received a silver medal for his painting entered in the same Panama-Pacific International Exhibition, worked with Price in the Monterey years as a mentor, sometimes employer, and always an encourager. When Price was having difficulty finding enough money to eat, Hansen wisely paid him \$25 a month to guarantee at least one good meal a day at a local restaurant. Price was employed by Hansen at times to mix paint, build frames, and help out at some of the classes Hansen taught in Monterey. Armin Hansen was a successful artist who even helped sell some of Price's early paintings. Hansen's help enabled Price to keep on pursuing the passion.

The Great Depression brought lean times to artists, and had it not been for the enlightened vision of certain forces in the Federal Administration, many artists would have either been forced to abandon their craft or face starvation, including C. S. Price. Price was 55 when the stock market crashed. Living even more frugally than ever, he managed to continue to paint, reusing canvases, painting on boards, etc. But as the Depression wore on, things got even tighter until The Work Projects Administration (WPA), a federally financed program, hired C. S. Price and paid him to create art. It was a huge financial stimulus for Price, providing him with long-needed materials, like large canvases for murals and quality paint, and a salary to work and pay his expenses. Price was the first painter in Oregon to sign up with the WPA, and he quickly spread the word to other struggling artists. It was a huge lift for artists in a desperate economy.

In a real way, the U.S. Government became one of Price's most significant benefactors through the WPA. His largest works were produced during his WPA years and remain on display throughout the Portland metro area. His most famous pieces hang in the C. S. Price Wing of Timberline Lodge up on Mt. Hood, built and dedicated to him in