

## Chapter 4 - THE SAN FRANCISCO AND MONTEREY YEARS (1915 - 1928)

by Frances Price Cook and Patrick J. Leach

In research my coauthor and I conducted about Uncle Clate's life during his San Francisco and Monterey period, we have found out some things we would like to share in this chapter. We quote extensively from Nancy Boas' book, **The Society of Six: California Colorists** (University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1988) with permission, and highly recommend the book for a better understanding of the influences on C. S. Price during his years in California.

No doubt it was an exciting time for him. He moved to the Bay Area, was exposed to different artistic styles, and became acquainted with many artists and art teachers during his time there. San Francisco and later Monterey became a destination for many of the artists on the West Coast, as it was for Uncle Clate.

I had always thought Uncle Clate went to the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition (PPIE) in 1915 just to view the art works, but I realize now he was greatly influenced by the art he saw there and the artists he met and became associated with. It is very possible Uncle Clate was searching for new influences on his art work, so much so that he was willing to move to a new area and settle down there for over a decade. Some of the artists were already known in the San Francisco area, and had helped design the exhibition itself. Artists Price became friends with and worked with included August Gay, Sheldon Connor Gile, Louis Siegriest, Maurice Logan, Bernard Von Eichman, and William Clapp (later known as the Society of Six), and others.

Some of the artists were already art teachers locally like Gottardo Piazzoni in San Francisco, and Armin Hansen in Monterey. Some of the artists were living on house boats on the San Francisco Bay, and invited Uncle Clate to live with them when he first moved to the Bay Area. He began to hear about artists living in Monterey and what they were doing.

To my knowledge this was the first time since art school in 1906 Uncle Clate was actually with so



C. S. Price at work, ca. 1947

many artists. What an exciting time for him to be exposed to other styles of art from all over the world and artists who were experimenting with different styles.

Until this time Uncle Clate's art was very literal and represented what the eye saw. His early work shows how talented he was at drawing and illustrating. Now much of the art he was seeing was very impressionistic and colorful and did not necessarily look like what the eye would see. Uncle Clate began experimenting with different styles of his own, and was evidently not satisfied with all the results. In 1920 he was observed actually cutting up some of his canvases and pushing them into the ocean through the spaces in a walkway over the waters of San Francisco Bay. Probably because he was such a talented artist and so good at drawing realistic views of subjects, he was sometimes criticized for changing his style.

Here we quote from Roger Saydack in his "The Frontier of C. S. Price." Roger was the guest Curator for a C. S. Price exhibition done in 1998 titled "C. S. Price Landscape, Image and Spirit" and our quotations come from the catalog that was produced for this exhibition.

"The (Panama-Pacific) exposition included a huge (more than 11,000 works) and largely conservative painting exhibition.<sup>1</sup> It also included paintings that were a revelation for Price.<sup>2</sup> Scattered among the thousands of traditional, realist pieces were paintings of a totally different sort by Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, Vincent Van Gogh, Odilon Redon, and others, in which the artist was painting to express something within himself or to create a relationship with his subject. These painters were not attempting to accurately depict the natural world. They sketched, altered, and cast aside the old rules of drawing, perspective, color and form in order to serve the larger purpose of creative expression. This was an entirely new way of painting for Price, and for that matter nearly everyone else. The ideas excited and confused him. He sensed they had potential for his search, but he did not understand how to use them. Piazzoni, a sophisticated, European-trained artist, was no less a revelation. Here was a man who believed passionately in the expressive power of art, and who painted the California landscape with a simplicity and a depth of feeling that Price immediately understood. Piazzoni felt and knew for himself what Price was searching for, and he believed in Price's painting. He recognized in Price's animals the same understanding that he put into his own landscapes.<sup>3</sup>

He studied with Gottardo Piazzoni in San Francisco for several years. "From Piazzoni, Price learned the ideas that led him from cowboy illustration to painting as a personal expression, and

also received the encouragement to persevere." (Boas, page 200, #42)

Gottardo Piazzoni "was almost alone among the older painters of San Francisco who gave aid and comfort to the younger generation in the very bitter warfare between conservatives and the modernists that raged here during the '30s and '40s. He never jabbered about preserving the integrity of the picture plane; he simply went out and preserved it." (Spangenberg, p. 31)

I know Uncle Clate was living on a houseboat on the San Francisco Bay in January of 1920 for this reason. My Uncle Ern and my Aunt Bessie had



*Untitled*, ca. 1920, Ink on paper, Collection of Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon, Gift of Frances Price Cook

come to Portland, Oregon to get married. My mother cooked them a wonderful wedding dinner. They then boarded a train en route to San Francisco. There they called on the artist Gottardo Piazzoni who knew Uncle Clate well and asked him to notify my uncle to come into San Francisco the next day to visit with his brother and his bride. Soon after, probably sometime in 1920, Uncle Clate made a decision to move to Monterey, where he already knew many of the artists whom he met while living in San Francisco.

<sup>1</sup> The Fine Arts Exhibitions at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, and their effect on Bay Area artists, is discussed in Nancy Boas, *Society of Six: California Colorists*, (San Francisco: Bedford Arts Publisher, 1988) pp. 53-71; and Terry St. John, "The Society of Six," in *Society of Six*, exhibition catalog, The Oakland Museum, 1972, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Callahan, "C. S. Price of Portland, Ore," *Art News*, Vol. 50, May, 1951.

<sup>3</sup> Mirelle Piazzoni Wood (Piazzoni's daughter), telephone interview with the author, March 13, 1997.

Quoting here from Helen Spangenberg in "Yesterday's Artists on the Monterey Peninsula" (Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art, Monterey, California, 1976):

"When he came to Monterey in his mid-forties, he shared a room with August Gay at the Stevenson House and, in the words of Gene McComas, 'they almost starved.' Price worked for Myron Oliver, making picture frames, and because canvas was so expensive, he often scraped off paint and used one piece over and over."

(Spangenberg, p. 62)

We quote from a newspaper article by John Cunningham (then the Director of the Carmel Art Institute) in the Monterey Peninsula Herald (October 31, 1950). "In 1919 a rather saintly, Bible-reading man in his middle forties, who painted more or less

'corny' illustrative scenes from his cowboy life, rented a room in the Stevenson House for \$5 a month. He lived in Monterey for 10 years without ever leaving the area. In those 10 years something happened to him. He changed, he developed, he grew. Today, Clayton S. Price is called by authorities 'one of the important painters in the annals of American Art.' ...All this must seem amazing to his friends and local artists, for Price, as he was called, did not seem too extraordinary. He was a well-set-up Will Rogers type of man in speech and manner.

"Price worked two years in Armin Hansen's classes (later to become the Carmel Art Institute). ...As Hansen says, 'He was good; never the best, but awfully good. He was searching for something. He worked in his own way. He was very sure of himself, and no matter what he did, it was always C. S. Price.'

"He was respected. He attracted others to him. People wanted to help him. He was admired and helped by a small, knowing group of painters and others. The Bruton sisters bought his paintings. Armin Hansen bought a number of small ones for \$25 which he gave away in order to get others interested in Price's work.'

"Price in return made his friends gifts of very modern and alive wood-carvings of cattle, wagons, plowmen, and other objects. August Gay, his neighbor and a fine artist himself, taught Price how to make picture frames. The Myron Olivers gave him long-term credit. Their ledgers are among the valued items photostated by the Portland Art Museum, as they give in detail the kinds of paint and material that went into Price's paintings. At times he

worked off his



C. S. Price's studio was located in the Robert Louis Stevenson House in Monterey, California, Photo by Anita Glenn Campbell

bills and when he left here in 1929, he left a large painting to be sold for \$50 to close his account. That painting reposed in Myron Oliver's store for years awaiting a buyer, but with the recent upsurge in Price's reputation, a local resident purchased it - at the same low figure set by the artist originally." (Cunningham article)

Uncle Clate became friends with artists in Oakland, California, who later became known as the Society of Six. These six artists named earlier in this chapter, Uncle Clate, and other artists living in the area, often got together for socializing, outdoor painting, and discussions about art, sometimes even poker games and dances.

He became friends with artist August Gay, and both lived in the Stevenson House, making frames and working in the canneries for cash. Artists would gather in the Stevenson House on