

This marks the third year that I have been working on the catalogue raisonné of work by Swedish-American painter Gunnar Widforss. I've thought for sometime that I would like to send out a newsletter to everyone that has helped and supported me in this exciting endeavor. This is the first of what I hope will be regular newsletters about the project. One of the most exciting and wonderful aspects of my work has been the many people who I've had the fortune of meeting, either in person or through correspondence. I would like to keep you all updated on the project. One thing that we all share in common is a love of Gunnar's work and a desire to gain wider recognition for it.

I recently reached a sort of a milestone in the catalogue. I now have more than 760 works listed. I know that a certain number of these are duplicate records that I'll have to reconcile but I'm still happy to have identified this many. People often ask if Gunnar did any oil paintings, or how many oil paintings he did. Out of the 760 paintings only 22 are oil paintings.

2012 ACTIVITIES

2012 will be a busy year. I just returned from presenting my latest article on Gunnar at the Third Grand Canyon History Symposium. Held at the South Rim every five years the three-day symposium is a wonderful mixture of different topics pertaining to Grand Canyon History. Topics range from exploration and park management to family histories and art. This year I presented an article titled "Gunnar Widforss – The Artist and the Myths." The article examines and clarifies some inaccurate information about Gunnar and his life that can be found on the internet.

I was also very fortunate to meet some early residents of the South Rim Village who remember meeting Gunnar when they were children in the 1930s. That was a real treat. I hope to meet with them later this year and ask them about their memories of him. One of them told me that "Gunnar was enamored with her mother's peach ice cream."

This summer I'll be in California to do research and to present some lectures. I'll also be visiting the Kansas State Library in Topeka to go through some Fred Harvey Company archives there and then on to

One of many paintings that I have photographs of, but I don't know the current location of, is this one of the mouth of Bright Angel Creek in Grand Canyon near Phantom Ranch. The photograph is in bad condition but you can see that the painting depicts the walls of the Inner Gorge of the Canyon. I do have good information on two other works that Gunnar painted from near the same location. Any assistance in locating this painting would be greatly appreciated.



GRANTS

This year I was fortunate to receive two generous grants for my work and research on Gunnar. The first is from the Swedish-American Historical Society in Chicago and the other is from the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation. The grants will assist with travel and research related costs. I am very grateful to be selected by both organizations to receive funding for my work and would like to express my appreciation.

2012 Activities, continued

Washington DC to work in the archives of the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. On my travels I also plan to properly photograph as many paintings as I can.

For those of you who may be interested in attending, my schedule for lectures is below.

August 14

Yosemite Forum, Yosemite National Park, CA
Lecture for the National Park Service.

August 17 - 19

Sequoia/Kings Canyon Natural History Association.
Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Park, CA.

September 7

Scandinavian Cultural Center of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA.

September 21

Svea Lodge of San Jose.

AN INTERESTING FIND

One of the most intriguing pieces of work by Gunnar that I have seen this year is this hand-colored photographic print (right). The original painting is a beautiful watercolor. The subject is Desert View Watchtower designed by Fred Harvey Company architect Mary Jane Colter. The Watchtower is located at Desert View on the South Rim and was completed in 1932.

This print was made from a photograph of the painting that may have been taken by Grand Canyon photographer Emery Kolb and then hand-colored by him. I currently know of two of these prints. Former owners of this print include James Earl Shirley who was the Livery Manger for Fred Harvey in the 1920s and 30s, and Victor Patrossa, manager of the El Tovar Hotel in the 1930s.

The Fred Harvey Company printed a set of Gunnar's paintings as postcards and four of them were of the Watchtower, including this particular painting.

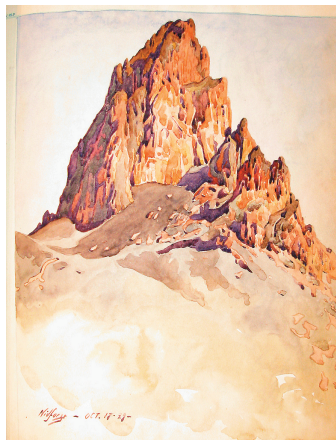


Desert View Watchtower. Handcolored photographic print. Courtesy private collector.

GUNNAR'S TRAVELS

Gunnar Widforss was an adventurous traveler as he sought beautiful landscapes to paint. In 1923 he made his first trip to the southwestern region of the United States and returned many times over the years before settling at the South Rim of Grand Canyon.

In October 1928 Gunnar visited Monument Valley and stayed at the Wetherill-Colville Guest Ranch in Kayenta. Artists who stayed with the Wetherills had established a tradition of doing drawings and paintings in the guest registry. Gunnar recorded his visit by doing a painting of Agathla Peak (above), a volcanic formation that towers above the surrounding desert just north of the guest ranch.



Agathla Peak. Watercolor. Photograph courtesy the John and Louisa Wetherill Collection.

In November 1932 Gunnar returned to Kayenta and checked into the guest ranch with one of his closest friends, Park Service naturalist Ansel Hall. During one of his visits to Monument Valley Gunnar painted the undated watercolor above. Currently, this



Monument Valley. Watercolor. Photograph courtesy Goulding's Trading Post Museum

is the only painting of Monument Valley that I have listed in the catalogue. It is an unusual view looking out toward Monument Valley from a canyon near Goulding's Trading Post.

At the Museum of Northern Arizona we are preparing an exhibition that will showcase works by early artists, including Gunnar, who visited the Monument Valley region and stayed at the Wetherill-Colville Guest Ranch. The exhibition, *Shadows on the Mesa - Artists of the Painted Desert and Beyond* will open on February 11th and run through May 28th.

As always I would appreciate any new information that you may have on Gunnar and his art work.

- Alan Petersen

