

# The Gunnar Widforss Catalogue Raisonné Project

June 2015

2014 was another very busy year and again full of exciting discoveries as I sought paintings, locations, and stories about Gunnar Widforss.

In March Anita and Anders Odell of Enskede, with their grandson Axel, came to visit the Museum of Northern Arizona and Grand Canyon. Anita is the granddaughter of Gunnar's sister Signe and Carl Deurell. I had a wonderful time visiting Anita and Anders in Enskede in 2013 and I was very happy to see them again so soon.

After a visit to the Museum and viewing the paintings by Gunnar that are part of the Museum's collection we spent a couple of days up at the South Rim. There we visited Gunnar's grave and did a couple of hikes during the beautiful spring days.



Anders, Eva, and Axel viewing Gunnar's paintings in the Easton Collection Center at the Museum of Northern Arizona.



## Adventures with Gunnar in Switzerland

In May I had plans to visit Lugano Switzerland where Mira would be graduating from Franklin University. Switzerland was an important place in Gunnar's life and career. It was there in 1904 that he determined to committing himself to becoming a landscape painter. Later, in 1912 he was working in Lugano when he received the letter notifying him that he had two works selected for the Paris Salon that year. Based on the work that he did there I made plans to visit Geneva, Zurich, Lucerne and then Lugano.

In Geneva I took a cable car to the top of Mount Saleve where I located the position that Gunnar painted a view of Geneva and the lake in the spring of 1904. It reminded me strongly of how he took the train to the top of Mount Lowe in Pasadena after arriving in Los Angeles in 1921. It was a very similar type of tourist destination.



*Saint Peter's Church*, 1904, watercolor, 10 x 13 inches (24.8 x 32.4 cm).



From Geneva I traveled to Zurich where I met up with Eva and Gernot Wendlandt. Eva is the granddaughter of Gunnar's oldest brother Pelle and his wife Eva and the sister of Gunnar Widforss of Åkersberga. There we spent two days walking around Zurich looking for a couple of locations where Gunnar painted in 1904. Mira took the train up from Lugano for a day and helped with the hunt. With the help of a man in a local museum we found the location of one of his paintings in the town of Thalwil, about 10 KM south of Zurich.





I also found the spot where Gunnar did a painting of St. Peter's church. You can see that the location hadn't changed a bit in 110 years except for the renovation of the building on the right.

When I arrived in Lugano my goal was to see if I could find the location of these two paintings (below) that were identified as having been possibly painted in Ticino. I visited two art galleries seeking any information I might find. Each of the two owners were very interested in the paintings that I showed them (including some painted in the United States) and in the story of Gunnar. Regarding the two paintings, they both said, "Oh, this is from Gandria!" Gandria is a very small village on Lago Lugano, just east of Lugano. They were both very nice fellows and will be good allies in the future. The very distinctive peak in the background of each painting is Monte dei Pizzoni.

The next morning I set out for Gandria, taking

a bus for about 8 KM and then walking along the coastline for another 2KM. It was a beautiful morning and a great walk. Cars are not allowed in Gandria so it still feels very traditional with its very narrow streets, pathways and stairs connecting its many levels. I began looking for the locations for these two paintings. After walking around for a little bit I ran into a street sweeper and I showed him the painting of the cross and asked where it might be. He pointed over his shoulder around the corner of the church we were standing by – and there it was! Right at the top of the stairs you see in the painting! I walked up and found the exact spot Gunnar painted it from. Notice that the stairs have been rebuilt and the cross turned and reset so that it is aligned with the walkway.

The second painting wasn't so easy. I wasn't able to find the exact spot because of new buildings and the density of the buildings in the village. I saw what looked like the houses Gunnar painted but I could not find the exact spot.



Village Cross, 1912, watercolor, 16 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches ( 34.9 x 29.8 cm).







As I walked back to Lugano I started thinking about popular tourist destinations like Lugano, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, the Alps, etc. etc. and how the views that painters like Gunnar painted and the views that are seen in postcards are often very similar, or identical. So I planned to look at some postcards in antique shops when I got back to Lugano.

I went to a very small antique shop near the town center that had four boxes of postcards sitting outside for people to look through. After I had spent about 30 minutes looking at more than 400 postcards of the Pope, skiers in the Alps, mountain climbing in the

Alps, many happy Swiss cows, and more of the Pope – I found the postcard below, the only one of its type in the boxes! I couldn't believe my eyes. It is the exact view that Gunnar painted in the second painting! Minus the trees.

I took the card in to buy it for 1 CHF and I showed the card and the photo I had of the painting to the shop owner. His eyes got as big as mine did and he said, "Oh – that one is 10 CHF!" He was of course joking and we both had a good laugh.

Since then, I have purchased two other antique postcards depicting the village cross from opposite views.



*Hillside Homes, 1912, watercolor, 15 x 11 3/8 inches ( 38 x 29 cm).*



Another Lugano find was the home where Gunnar stayed in August of 1912 and where he received the news that two of his paintings of the Côte d'Azur had been accepted in the 1912 Paris Salon.

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## A Big Surprise on eBay!

Yet another remarkable thing took place while I was in Lugano - Something amazing showed up for sale on eBay. Gunnar's first painting of Grand Canyon!

You may recall that in last year's newsletter I wrote about finding a photo in Gunnar's scrapbook of a painting that he identified as the first painting that he did of Grand Canyon. That would have been in July 1923. I wrote to some friends in Flagstaff who I knew were looking for a painting of Grand Canyon by Gunnar and they were able to purchase the painting!

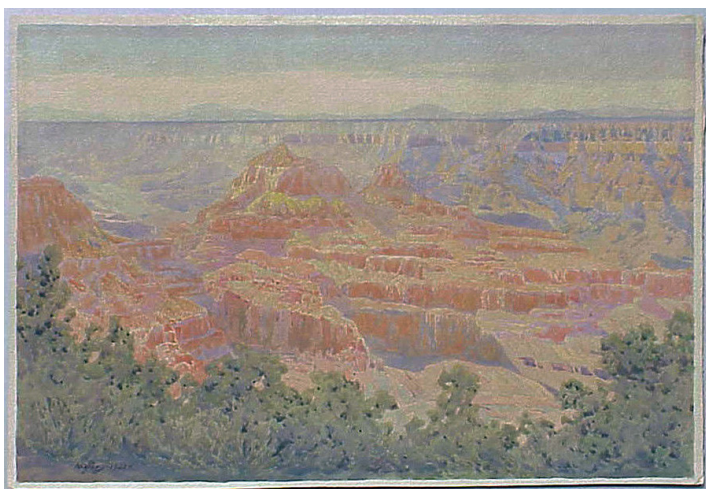
Unfortunately, the painting, *North Rim View*, is fairly badly sun damaged. The proud new owners are planning to have it treated and stabilized.



The postcard, and two others (right).







North Rim View, 1923, watercolor, 12 1/2 x 18 inches (31.8 x 45.7 cm).

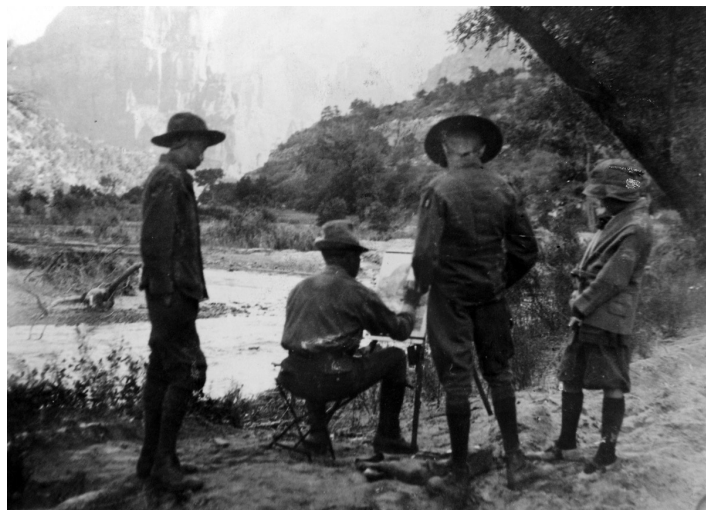
## Gunnar Widforss Visits Grand Canyon

In September, Gunnar Widforss of Åkersberga came for a visit. Gunnar is the grandson of Gunnar's oldest brother Pelle, and the brother of Eva Wendlandt. Following a three day river trip in Grand Canyon Gunnar hiked up the Bright Angel Trail. He then came to Flagstaff for a visit to the museum. While in Flagstaff, Gunnar also met Grand Canyon painter Bruce Aiken. We then drove to the North Rim for three days where we hiked along the Widforss Trail and the next day drove out to Point Sublime. We had a great time and the changing aspen leaves were beautiful.



Gunnar Widforss at Point Sublime, Grand Canyon, and with painter Bruce Aiken in Flagstaff.

## Gunnar Widforss and the Sands Family



Gunnar Widforss and the Sands Children, Zion, August 1923.

Another photograph that I originally saw in Gunnar's scrapbook also revealed its secrets this year. The photograph shows Gunnar in Zion National Park with three children. Through fortuitous correspondence I came to meet a wonderful couple, Jennifer and Charlie Sands of Phoenix. Charlie's grandfather Louis Marshall Sands was a successful farmer in Glendale Arizona in the early 20th century.

In July 1923 the Sands family made a trip to Grand Canyon. There on the North Rim they stayed at the Wylie Way Camp where they met Gunnar who was there on his first visit, and had painted *North Rim View*. After he returned to Zion the family met up with him there. In the photograph, above, he appears to be working on a painting of Angel's Landing.



Two years later, the Sands family again met up with Gunnar near Dyerville in northern California's Redwood Empire. These two photographs come from extensive scrapbooks that Frances Porter Sands made documenting the family's travels.

Best wishes for the coming year.  
Alan Petersen

