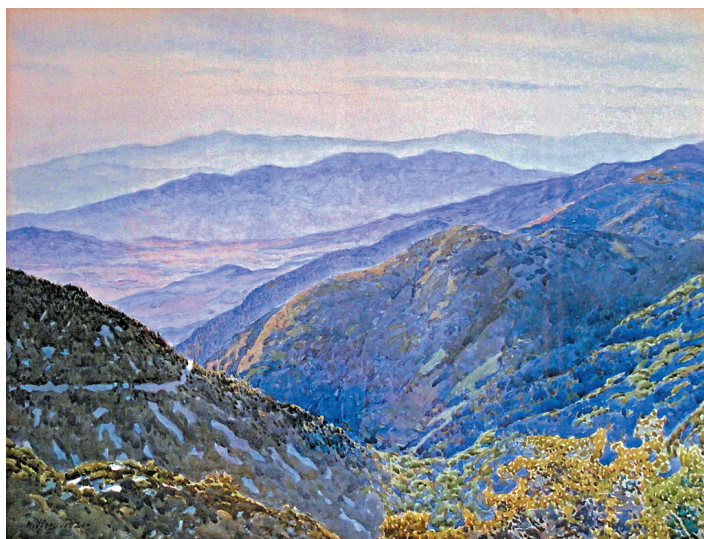


The Gunnar Widforss Catalogue Raisonné Project

April 2014

It was a very busy winter for me, which delayed this edition of the newsletter. Last year was an extremely productive year for work on the Gunnar Widforss project. I added many new works to the catalogue raisonné and located a wealth of materials pertaining to Gunnar's life and work, including letters written by the artist to his family. The highlight of my year was meeting the current members of Gunnar's family in Sweden last summer. I spent six weeks in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Germany conducting research and photographing paintings for the catalogue. My work was again supported by a generous grant from the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation and I would like to extend a very grateful note of appreciation for their continued support. My sabbatical leave for teaching at Coconino Community College also continued through June and this allowed lots of time to devote to the project.

1921 - Gunnar's Arrival in the Golden State



View from Mt. Lowe, 1921, watercolor on paper, 13 x 17 1/8 inches (33 x 43.5 cm). Courtesy private collector.

A painting that has always intrigued me provided for a very interesting and exciting series of discoveries. When I first became aware the painting, identified simply as *California Scene*, it appeared to be a generic view of Southern California hills and valleys. Following an intuitive hunch I contacted some US Forest Service staff in the Angeles National Forest. They identified the location as Mt. Lowe, located just to the north of Pasadena. Last April while visiting Pasadena with Catherine I rode a bicycle up Mount Lowe in search of the site where



Gunnar Widforss (far right center) at the Mt. Lowe Railway, January 1921.

Gunnar may have made the painting. Climbing one of the trails to the site of an old inn and tavern I was able to find the exact spot where Widforss made the painting. The view in the painting is west towards the Verdugo Mountains, Burbank, and the Santa Monica Mountains.

In letters to his mother from Los Angeles Gunnar mentions painting at Mt. Lowe for a couple of weeks. *California Scene*, or *View from Mt. Lowe*, was one the very first works he painted following his arrival in the United States in January 1921.

In the early twentieth century Mount Lowe was a popular weekend destination for visitors seeking outdoor recreation. Following the successful model that he had developed in Europe, Widforss had discovered in Mt. Lowe a suitable location where he could be assured of sales to tourists and he went to work. Serendipitously, last summer while working in Stockholm, I found a souvenir photograph of Widforss, above, standing inconspicuously on the train platform at Mt. Lowe. He was newly arrived in the United States and about to enter in to the most creative and productive period of his career.

For more about the fascinating story of Mt. Lowe visit www.mountlowe.org



Family and Friends

Last July I met nineteen members of Widforss' family in Sweden and Germany. They were all exceptionally warm, welcoming and excited to hear about my work. I want to thank each of them for making my visit so special - Carl-Olof and Yrsa Deurell, Ole, Mats, Jens, Oskar and Jenny Deurell; Anita, Anders, and Felix Odell; Gunnar Widforss; Eva and Gernot Wendlandt; Per Widforss; Antonia Jacobius; Gunilla and Peter Heinemann; Ulla and Lars Andersson. I also had the good fortune to meet Carl Häggart the grandson of one of Gunnar's closest friends, also named Carl Häggart. One of the remarkable things about the Widforss family is the creativity that runs through the many generations. In the present generations there are at least three artists, a photographer, a filmmaker, a writer, two musicians, and two dancers.



More than 350 nicely organized letters that chronicle Gunnar's life and adventures.

Carl-Olof Deurell, a retired architect, is the eldest member of the family now at 91 years old. He recalled meeting Gunnar Widforss when he returned to Sweden to visit his family in 1930. At the time Carl-Olof was eight years old and today he still has vivid memories of meeting his uncle, walking with him, and what a big event it was for the family. He has maintained a collection of paintings and drawings that was a vital and significant resource for me. The works include finished and unfinished works from childhood and spanning Widforss' entire career. I spent an entire day at Carl-Olof and Yrsa's home photographing paintings and drawings and scanning letters.

As you can see in the photograph Carl-Olof, and Yrsa have done a great job of filing and protecting the more than 350 letters that Gunnar wrote home to his mother Blenda throughout his lifetime of travel and painting. It was the mother lode, an invaluable resource. Carl-Olof and Yrsa were the kindest, warmest hosts and I'll always fondly and respectfully remember my day with them in Vällingby.

Ole Deurell, one of Carl-Olof and Yrsa's sons, was also a wonderful host and resource. One evening we went for a bicycle ride with a couple of other friends and he showed me many places in Södermalm where Widforss painted when he lived in that part of the city. Being an avid cyclist, this was one of the big highlights of my time in Stockholm.



Katarina Kyrkan, Södermalm, watercolor on paper, 9 7/8 x 7 1/8 inches (25.1 x 18.1 cm).





Yes - Research by bicycle is *the* best way to go. Thank-you Ole!

Fredrik Sjöberg

One of the meetings I most looked forward to in July was with Fredrik Sjöberg, author of *Flytkonsten* (*The Art of Flight*) a book about Widforss and the bohemian life. Fredrik and I have corresponded since 2010 and he has provided invaluable help with my research. It was a great pleasure to meet with him twice and talk at great length about Widforss and Fredrik's interest and research into the artist. His wife Johanna prepared wonderful meals for us and showed us her book bindery studio and her beautiful artistic books. Fredrik's English translator, Tom Teal, is due to translate *Flytkonsten* into English next year. I can't wait!

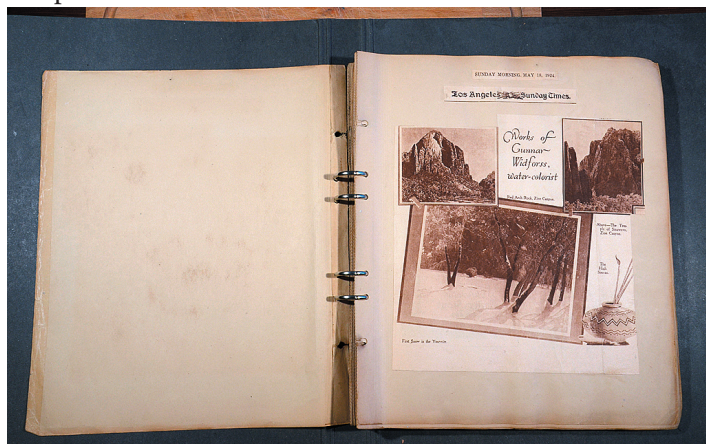


Fredrik and Johanna Sjöberg, Tom Teal, Anne Nou and Catherine enjoying a beautiful Swedish summer afternoon. It was a great pleasure to finally meet Fredrik.

Other Treasures

While in Sweden and Germany I photographed 397 paintings and drawings. I scanned more than 350 letters and photographed or scanned more than 400 other documents or photographs. Additionally, I visited and did research at the Swedish National Library, the Danish National Library, Örebro Läns Museum, Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt in Gothenburg, the Smålands Museum in Växjö, and a number of auction houses in Stockholm and Copenhagen. As a result of my work last summer I now have more than 1,200 paintings and drawings listed in the draft catalogue.

One of the many remarkable objects that I was able to study and photograph was Gunnar's personal scrapbook!



First page of Gunnar's scrapbook.



Among the many photographs of paintings in the scrapbook was one that Widforss identified as his "first painting of Grand Canyon," done in July 1923 from a location on the trail on the North Rim that was later named for him.





Ansel Hall

If you've been following my story about Gunnar Widforss you know that I've written much about his friend and patron Ansel Hall. Hall was an important early leader in the newly formed National Park Service. He is largely responsible for the early development of the Park Service's interpretative program and he founded the Yosemite Museum, with financial support from another of Gunnar's patrons George C. Merriam of the Carnegie Foundation. Hall was an important figure who provides a connection for much of Widforss' activity in the United States.

Over the years Ansel Hall purchased at least forty-two of Gunnar's paintings. Most of them were of Yosemite, Zion and Grand Canyon. Gunnar always bartered when he could and in November 1923 he purchased his second car, a Chevrolet Roadster, from Hall "for \$300 and a few paintings," he wrote to his mother.

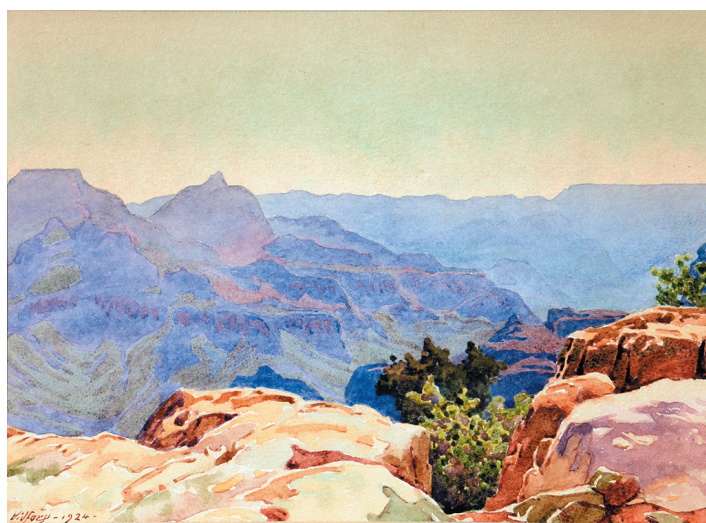


Gunnar with the Chevy Roadster he purchased from Ansel Hall in Yosemite Valley, December 1923

In October I met with four of Ansel Hall's daughters in Colorado and I photographed their paintings. This gives me an almost complete set of photographs of the paintings that Hall had from Gunnar.

Other News

Another fascinating meeting that I had while in Stockholm was with Karin Sidén, Director General at Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde Museet. I met with Ms. Sidén and told her the story of Gunnar Widforss and showed her a small selection of his paintings. We had a great conversation about the artist and she suggested that I submit a proposal to her for the purpose of presenting an exhibition of Widforss' work at Waldemarsudde. It would be a great accomplishment to be able to have an exhibition of Gunnar's works at Waldemarsudde and the museum would perfectly suit his works.



Grand Canyon, 1924, watercolor on paper, 7 1/4 x 10 inches (18.4 x 25.4 cm). Courtesy private collector.

A painting from Gunnar's second season at Grand Canyon, formerly in the collection of Ansell Hall.

Last year I presented two lectures on Gunnar Widforss. The first, along with artist Elizabeth Black, was in September when I presented a lecture on Gunnar as part of the Grand Canyon Celebration of Art at the South Rim of Grand Canyon. It was attended by approximately two hundred artists and other visitors there for the event. Then in November I gave a lecture at the Phoenix Art Museum, which I always enjoy visiting.

As always - if you happen across any paintings or other materials pertaining to Gunnar Widforss or his friends and patrons please contact me.

Best wishes for the coming year.

Alan Petersen

