

## Chapter 16

# Beyond the Big Bend

### Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Oklahoma

After 1935, the home base and art studio of Fred Darge was Dallas, Texas. The majority of his art work was done in his adopted state of Texas and thus is considered a regionalist. Since Darge was a world traveler prior to the end of WW II, it is not to be expected that this inveterate traveler would paint totally within the confines of the state of Texas and be happy forever. Even though West Texas is approximately five hundred by five hundred square miles, there were times when he just had to get out and stretch his legs a little and see what it actually looked like where the sun disappeared every evening.

Those places were Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. Oklahoma, or Indian Territory as some people still call it, wasn't located west of Texas, but it had a treasure that Darge just had to see for himself, the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (WMWR). Established in 1901, it is the oldest managed wildlife facility in the United States Fish and Wildlife Service system.<sup>1</sup> Darge apparently loved the natural world and conveyed to his art collectors a vast number of scenes meticulously painted of north American wildlife and some birds. He excelled in replicating animal figures.



North American Bison

What did he really want to see at the WMWR? The Texas Longhorns would be the right answer. However, he was also interested in the bison, elk and white-tailed deer. The WMWR was critically important in saving the American buffalo from extinction. In 1907, the American Bison Society transported 15 bison, six bulls and nine cows from the Bronx Zoo to the refuge. Upon arrival, famous Comanche leader Quanah Parker and a host of other Native Americans and others assembled to welcome the bison to their new home. The bison

must surely have been thankful to leave the Bronx Zoo and relocate to an area more familiar to their natural habitat. At that time, bison had been extinct on the southern Great Plains for almost 30 years. The bison herd now numbers about 650 on the refuge.<sup>2</sup> [For further information on Longhorn cattle, please refer to the Chapter 23 titled "Texas Longhorns."](#)

Arizona became a territory of the United States on February 24, 1863 and was admitted to the Union as the 48<sup>th</sup> state on February 14, 1912, coinciding with Valentine's Day. It was created from the western half of the New Mexico Territory during the American Civil War.<sup>3</sup> The history of Arizona goes as far back as the early Spanish explorers who first came to the region in 1539.

<sup>4</sup> However, before the Spanish were the Native Americans. It is always intriguing how groups



**A Friendly Encounter**, 16" x 20", Oil on Canvas, Circa 1950's, Courtesy Dallas Fine Art Auction

or visitors come and go, but Native Americans patiently preserve their venerable heritage. They somehow seem to outlast everyone else. It is said, "everything outside the reservations change and change, but within the reservation they have seen it all before."

While researching the Grand Canyon State as they liked to be called, the Office of Tourism website listed 100+ fun and fascinating facts about Arizona. This very scenic state with a very colorful history of the old west is loaded with many interesting stories. As has been pointed out

previously, if there was a place Darge could go and paint a scene of ordinary people going about their traditional routines for art collectors and patrons, he would find it no matter where it was. His instinctive mind pointed him in the direction of the Navajo Nation. This is one of the places in Arizona Darge was looking for. Native American tribal lands make up 19.8 million acres, or about 27.1 percent of the land in Arizona. Traditions on tribal lands often change slowly, which is why Darge wanted to see it for himself. *A Friendly Encounter* is a classic Navajo scene of a family getting ready to travel by horse drawn wagon; perhaps they were going to the nearest trading post.



**Navajo Sheep Herder, Navajo Reservation**, 16" x 24", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts.

This enormous reservation is located in the northeastern corner of Arizona and actually extends into the southeastern corner of Utah and the northwestern corner of New Mexico. It is the largest Native American reservation in the United States that encompasses 17,544,500 acres and occupies 27,413 square miles. The population of the reservation is 350,000 as of 2016.<sup>5</sup> This reservation is so large, that inside the Navajo is the Hopi reservation.<sup>6</sup> The entire Navajo reservation can hold 2/3 of the state of Massachusetts and all of the states of New Jersey, Hawaii, Connecticut, Delaware and

Rhode Island. Now we know why the Navajos call themselves a nation. They are one and it is large.

*Navajo Sheep Herder*, is a distinctive painting for several reasons. Darge has carefully illustrated the rural life of a Navajo family actively engaged in their daily routine of tending the flock that produces the wool, mohair and other byproducts used in their efforts to literally scratch out a minimum existence in an area of Arizona know for an annual rain fall of less than 12". The



Navajo Home, Northern Arizona, 9" x 12", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts

surroundings are majestic, but harsh. Notice the background of the high mesas that are commonly seen throughout the reservation. The shepherdess is not all that far from her home. Their homes, called "hogans", are usually built with wooden poles, tree bark and mud.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the limited rainfall, they do not have to worry too much about the mud washing away from their dwellings. Next to the hogan will be a set of corrals and pens

to house goats and sheep at night.

If Darge was here today, it might be possible to pleasantly suggest that the scene would have been an even more great painting if it had been larger, at least a 25" x 30. Maybe Darge didn't think a larger painting would sell, but over the recent years, he would have been proved wrong. Many artists have painted on the Navajo Reservation starting in the late 1800's. Darge will be credited with producing paintings highlighting the existence of the Navajo people going about their age-old traditions of their daily lives.



Example of Classic Navajo Blanket Circa 1880's

Sheep and goats are the main stay of their farming activities along with corn. The wool from the sheep is hand processed into yarn used for weaving fine blankets and rugs. The finished weavings are then taken to the trading post and bartered for staples like flour, cooking oil, cloth, buttons etc. In more recent decades, the arts and crafts of Navajo artists has been very marketable to visitors and collectors of textiles, ceramics and paintings done in watercolors, oils and acrylics.

Fine vintage Navajo blankets and rugs are highly valued and prized by collectors throughout the country. In 2012 a very rare Navajo Chief's Blanket from the 1840's, lot #1062 sold at auction for \$1,800,000 at John Moran Auctioneers in Monrovia, California.<sup>8</sup> The history of Navajo blankets is long and storied. It is an intricate textile form of art that is both utilitarian and decorative.

Most artist obtain their information about unique places to visit and paint from other artist and periodicals. Situated thirty miles south of Flagstaff, Arizona is the small highland desert town of Sedona that is surrounded by red-rock buttes, steep canyon walls and pine forests.



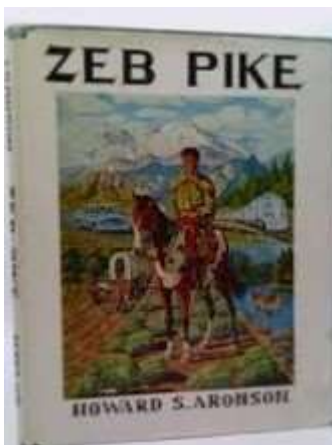
**Approaching Storm, Sedona Arizona, 12" x 16",**  
Oil on Board, Circa 1950's, Courtesy Heritage  
Auctions

Vacationers in Arizona always have it on their list of must-see places to visit. Darge also had it on his list. The attraction to Sedona is its array of red sandstone formations. The formations appear to glow in brilliant orange and red when illuminated by the rising or setting sun.<sup>9</sup> We do not know the number of Sedona paintings Darge completed. There is more than one, because this is Darge's preferred type of colorful landscape to paint.

Colorado is nicknamed the "Centennial State" because it became a state one century after the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence. The state is named for the Colorado River, which early Spanish explorers named the Rio Colorado for the ruddy silt the river carried from the mountains. The territory of Colorado was organized on February 28, 1861, and on August 1, 1876, U. S. President Ulysses S. Grant signed Proclamation 230 admitting Colorado to the Union as the 38<sup>th</sup> state. Colorado is noted for its very diverse geography of high mountains (Pikes Peak 14,115'), high plains and deep canyons. There are fifty-three mountains in the state that are 14,000' plus.<sup>10</sup> Along with the many big mountains are many big ranches.

The date of Darge's first visit to the state of Colorado is unknown. The only reliable clue to his Colorado art work would probably be the notation or titles written by Darge on the back of the canvas stretcher or canvas board. A careful look at the style of the signature may also assist in a date range.

Noted Dallas physician, Dr. Howard Stanley Aronson wrote an abridged biography of Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike for whom Pike's Peak was named. Dr. Aronson's purpose in writing *Zeb Pike* was an effort to give more acclaim to Pike's accomplishments as an explorer of the American west than he has achieved in view of the vast area he covered, the value of his service to his country and the influence he had on the course of our Texas history.



Dr. Aronson chose none other than Fred Darge to do all of the illustrations. As one would expect, Darge put his heart, body and soul into this project and made it a work of art. In this vividly illustrated book are ten paintings by Darge that are used as explanations and interpretations to exemplify numerous events in Pike's explorations and experiences. The inside of the book cover, both front and back, showcase Darge's ability to superbly illustrate many of the most common animals found in north American wildlife.<sup>11</sup> Dr. Aronson

must have been very pleased with the job Fred Darge did for him.

*Zeb Pike* is a well written and colorfully illustrated book published by The Naylor Company of San Antonio in 1963. Naylor advertisements carried the byline of, “Publishers of the Southwest.” Dr. Aronson could not have made a better selection when choosing The Naylor Company to publish *Zeb Pike*. They were noted for their publishing of books about Texas and the Southwest, including novels, histories, biographies, cookbooks and collections of stories and newspaper columns. <sup>12</sup> Since the book was published in 1963, perhaps Darge visited Colorado in the 1960 to 1961, time frame which would allow plenty of time to complete all the necessary illustrations that made this such a colorful publication.

During research for this book, it was not possible to locate any painting that Darge may have completed in his time spent in Colorado other than what is pictured in *Zeb Pike*.

When Darge went to New Mexico, 1945/1946 the story turned out very differently. The research of auctions and newspapers and the number of paintings that were listed and mentioned reflects that Darge spent a lot of time in New Mexico. His paintings illustrate that he appropriately painted northern New Mexico and all the way down to down to the White Sands National Monument located southwest of Alamogordo and numerous towns in between.

Darge’s mission of focusing on people actively engaged in their daily routine was deployed many times in his paintings completed in Taos. The Taos art colony was undoubtedly mentioned often while Darge was attending the Art Institute of Chicago. Darge’s art career may have begun in the Big Bend, however it would be only a matter of time before he traveled to Taos. He needed to see if all the stories he had heard about the little out of the way art colony were true. Judging from the number of paintings completed, he apparently found Taos to his liking. If New Mexico is “the land of enchantment,” Darge like all the other artists became enchanted with what he saw.



Northern New Mexico has a number of famous Roman Catholic churches. El Santuario de Chimayo located at Chimayo south of Taos is one of the most visited churches painted by artists in all of New Mexico. The interior is breath taking. Each year some 300,000 people from all over the world make pilgrimages to the Santuario de Chimayo during Holy Week, especially on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, some seeking blessings and some in fulfillment of pilgrims’ walk from as far away as Albuquerque, some

**Sunday Night**, 18" x 24", El Santuario de Chimayo, Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy Altermann Galleries 2014

ninety miles to the south.<sup>13</sup> As any artist would say, “a great scene deserves a great painting” and this is exactly what Fred Darge has produced.



**The Woodman**, 16" x 20", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy David Dike Fine Arts 2007

What painting could better illustrate northern New Mexico and its people actively engaged in their daily routine than *The Woodman*. The woodman is with his two donkeys walking down the road presumably on his way to deliver a load of wood to a customer. Notice his left arm up and waving to the lady on the right, possible an acquaintance or even a customer. He is probably telling his donkeys they need to walk a little faster so they don't get wet. The foreground and background look like this could possibly be the Taos area.

Never let it be said that Fred Darge was a not a student of history. History makes good paintings even better. The Tunstall-McSween Store is another typical example of a non-descript building that houses some important and exceptionally interesting history of Lincoln, New Mexico. John H. Tunstall (1853 – 1878) was born in London, England and became an early



**Tunstall-McSween Store, Lincoln, New Mexico**, 12" x 16", Oil on Canvas Board, Collection of Ken and Elsie Duperry

day rancher and merchant in Lincoln County. Tunstall competed head-on with the ethnic Irish merchants and politicians who ran the county and the town of Lincoln. He was the first man killed in what ignited and the Lincoln County War which was an economic and political rivalry that resulted in a deadly armed conflict.<sup>14</sup> An estimated nineteen men were killed during this spiteful conflict.

Tunstall's ranch was located thirty miles south of Lincoln. One of his employees was a young ranch hand by the name of William H. Bonney, aka Billy the Kid. After the death of Tunstall, Bonney remained in New Mexico and later moved to Fort Sumner where he became the leader of his outlaw gang of thieves and killers. Lincoln County Sheriff Pat Garrett had been given a mandate to get rid of Billy the Kid and his gang of outlaws as soon as humanly possible. Garrett and his deputies finally caught up with Billy and his gang at Fort Sumner and completed their assignment.<sup>15</sup>



Henry McCarty aka Billy the Kid, circa 1880, Photograph provided by Wikipedia

More has been written about Billy the Kid than any other gunslinger in the history of the American West. Although whatever the reason, it is difficult to understand why the history of Billy has been romanticized. The truth of the matter is, he was no more than a thief and cold-blooded killer. It is reported that Billy once claimed he had killed 21 men, "one for every year of my life." A reliable contemporary authority estimated the actual total was more like nine, four on his own and five with the aid of others. <sup>16</sup> Although an ongoing controversy disputes the fact, Sheriff Pat Garrett is credited with the killing of the outlaw on July 14, 1881 at the Maxwell ranch outside of Fort Sumner. Sheriff Garrett became a historic legend of the old west for killing the notorious Billy the Kid. Billy may

have died, only to have Hollywood bring him back to life. Starting in 1911, there have been more than fifty movies made with this gun-toting outlaw's story appearing on the big screen. <sup>17</sup>



Pat Floyd Jarvis Garrett, Photograph provided by Wikipedia



Sheriff Pat Garrett, Date of Photo Unknown, Photo Courtesy of Las Cruces Sun News



Replica of Pat Garrett's Sheriff's Badge. The original badge sold at auction for \$100,000

Garrett was murdered as the result of a conflict in a business deal that had gone bad involving a land lease on his son's ranch on February 29, 1908, near Las Cruces, New Mexico. It was never determined who actually killed Garrett because of the numerous people involved. The only eyewitness to Garrett's murder never appeared at his trial, which lasted only one day and ended with an acquittal. <sup>18</sup>



**Two Pueblo Indians, Espanola, New Mexico, 12" x 16", Oil on Canvas Board, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Freeman, Jr.**



**Old Taos, New Mexico, 24" x 30", Oil on Canvas, Courtesy of the Felder Collection**





**Street in Arroyo Seco, 9" x 12", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts**

**After 1950, it is estimated that Darge spent at least 35% of his time in New Mexico. He like others before him, experienced for himself the wonders of “the land of enchantment.” It is wonderfully reflected in his many paintings.**