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Randall Davey

Like many Santa Fe artists of his day, Randall Davey (1887-1964) came from the East Coast. Unlike most of his contemporaries, the adventurous early automobile enthusiast traveled here behind the wheel of a car.

Davey and artist John Sloan visited Santa Fe in the summer of 1919, and Davey fell in love with the Land of Enchantment at first sight. His art career in New York had stalled, and the Southwest adventure offered a fresh start. Davey bought an old mill on Upper Canyon Road and moved there permanently the next year. It was a path that had been calling him since his early days as an artist.

Davey was born in East Orange, New Jersey. His father was an architect, and he enrolled at Cornell for architecture in 1905. Three years later he dropped out and moved to New York to study art, to the consternation of his father.

At the New York School of Art, Davey forged a close friendship with teacher and Ashcan School artist Robert Henri. Henri was friends with the founders of the Taos Society of Artists, and was a huge influence in cultivating New Mexico's budding reputation as an arts destination.

When Henri left to form his own school in 1909, Davey stayed behind to study under Charles W. Hawthorne. Hawthorne soon moved to Henri's institution, and Davey followed him. In 1910 Davey exhibited with George Bellows and Stuart Davis and in 1913 his artwork was in the Armory Show, the most influential modern art exhibition in U.S. history.

Davey continued to exhibit and collect awards across the country until 1917, when he moved to Cuba to avoid the World War I draft. When he returned to New York a year later, his ambition was diminished. He only exhibited two paintings in 1919 before his fateful trip to Santa Fe with Sloan.

The 1850s mill that Davey and his wife converted into a two-story home, now maintained by the Randall Davey Audubon Center, was just the first of his contributions to Santa Fe's swiftly changing cultural landscape. He built a polo pitch on his property and recorded the pastime in many of his works. The charcoal sketch in our collection shows several men at polo practice, a novel sight in the Desert Southwest.

Though Davey mostly kept to himself, he was friends with influential artists in the area and passionate about life in the New Mexico.

"I wouldn't trade my life here where I can hunt, shoot, ride, for all the committee-going and boot-licking you've got to do in a city for anything," he said. "An artist might starve for food here, but he'll starve spiritually in a place like New York."

Santa Fe was the stage for the second phase of Davey's career. He developed a diverse oeuvre of still lifes, horse-racing and polo scenes, artistic nudes and landscapes. He was well-respected

around the country for his work, and took teaching positions in Chicago, Kansas City, Missouri and New York.

Davey's enthusiasm for automobile travel persisted throughout his life. He died in 1964 in a car accident on his way to California at 77 years old. His artwork is a chronicle of the early days of the Santa Fe Art Colony and the pioneering people who built it from the ground up.