

In Search of Sadakichi Hartmann



I first became aware of Sadakichi Hartmann 25 years ago when I began working at the Banning Public Library. Who was this man with the strange, exotic name who kept showing up in one form or another? Everything I read about him or that was written by him intrigued me and I began the search to find out more about Sadakichi. The intrigue grew when I discovered his connection to the San Geronimo Pass. How this world renowned art critic, writer, poet, artist, and socialite ended up living the last twenty years of his life in rural Beaumont and Banning was a compelling mystery.

Fortunately the resources to search were ample in the library's Sadakichi files and the UCR Special Collections archive of Sadakichi. The Special Collections Department at UCR has the world's most comprehensive collection of material related to Sadakichi Hartmann thanks to donations by Wistaria Linton, Sadakichi's daughter, who worked for years in the photography department at UCR. Research opportunities are available at UCR Special Collections by appointment.

Sadakichi died in 1944 and remembrances of him from Pass residents and family linger to this day. Recent discoveries from the Guy Bogart Collection at the San Geronio Pass Historical Society have added new insights into Sadakichi's years in the Pass and I spent weeks going through dusty boxes of diaries and correspondence between Sadakichi and former Beaumont Mayor Guy Bogart.

This article will be published in three parts. The first will be a brief biography of Sadakichi, the second will focus on his time spent in the San Geronio Pass, and the third will cover the Gene Fowler Book, "Minutes of the Last Meeting," and Sadakichi's final days at Catclaw Siding on the Morongo Reservation.

Part One:

The Most Famous Person of the San Geronio Pass No One Has Heard Of

Sada who? is the usual response I get from people when I ask them if they have ever heard of Sadakichi Hartmann.

Sadakichi Hartmann's unique life has inspired numerous works by biographers who have attempted to capture the scope of his genius. From his early days in Europe and the eastern United States to his final days on the Morongo Reservation Sadakichi observed life using a giant pallet of mediums he was continually mastering to express his experiences. He traveled to the major art capitals of Europe and the United States, passionately visiting museums and artists from Whistler to Thomas Hart Benton. His artistic interests were not confined to visual arts. His personal relationships with Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound and other poets and writers of the time drew him into the world of words which became another form of expression for his visionary view of life.

Carl Sadakichi Hartmann was born on the Japanese island of Desima between 1867 and 1869. His parents were Oskar Hartmann, a German merchant and Ossada, his Japanese mother, who died soon after childbirth. In Sadakichi's poem, *To My Mother*, he writes, "A Woman's death created me. Rest with my thanks. Rest softly under the hills of Kobe while wind and birds sing everlasting funeral rites to Thee, my mother."

Sadakichi was raised by a rich uncle in Hamburg and at age 13 was sent to America by a disinterested father with only a few dollars in his pocket. This seemingly heartless rejection by his father was a source of bitterness and unresolved melancholy for much of Sadakichi's life.

Sadakichi was sent to Philadelphia in 1882, at the age of 15. Sometimes living on one meal a day and still in his teen years he worked a variety of menial jobs while studying art and writing furiously. He spent his nights reading in the Philadelphia Mercantile Library and began building an early foundation from which he created his own expressions of art.

Sadakichi and Walt Whitman

In 1884, at the age of 17, Sadakichi became entranced with the poetry of Walt Whitman and sought him out as a mentor. He visited the poet in New Jersey and began a long and complex relationship with Whitman who hired the young and brilliant Sadakichi as a translator for some of his foreign correspondence. Sadakichi could read, write and speak English, French, and German, but not Japanese.

Sadakichi revered Whitman, who was the principle influence on Sadakichi's own poetic style. In Sadakichi's words; "Walt Whitman, I do not call thee master, but I am bound to thee forever, thy works were to me, except Love and Nature, the grandest lessons of my life." Sadakichi later gave up writing poetry because he felt that "Whitman had said first everything that I wanted to say." Hartmann and Whitman maintained their friendship and collaboration until Whitman's death in 1892.

In 1885, the 17 yr. old Hartmann left for Europe to explore its art galleries and museums. He studied art and literature in Munich, Berlin, Brussels and Paris and worked as a stage apprentice at the Royal Theater in Munich. During this time he studied all aspects of the theater as well as ballet.

His study of ballet evolved into a dance form unique to Sadakichi. He was almost as well known for his wild, improvised dances as he was for his writings and critiques. His dancing was said to be an Influence on the iconoclastic modern dancer Isadora Duncan. Sadakichi continued these improvisational dances into his later years. Journalist Harry Lawton quotes Banning attorney Merrill Brown, who attended some Hollywood parties with Sadakichi in the 1930s, "He danced like a graceful, whirling dervish."

After a few more years of studying in Paris and arguing and socializing with some of the leading French painters and writers of the time; Rimbaud, Verlaine, Stephen Mallarme, Anatole France and many others, Sadakichi returned to Philadelphia and later New York, working as a journalist. He occasionally traveled back to Europe. On one of these excursions to Paris in 1892, he met the painter James Whistler and later wrote the "Whistler Book" in the early 1900s.

By this time Sadakichi was earning his reputation as a great art critic and writer. His brilliant use of the English language was gaining the respect of scholars in the art world. Sadakichi's years of study were now exploding into numerous forms that would propel his creativity until the end of his life.

Hartmann was one of the first to recognize photography as a true art form. Working with Alfred Stieglitz he wrote articles and essays in early photographic journals, ***Camera News*** and ***Camera Work***. He wrote nearly 700 known published articles on the subject of photography often using the pseudonym Sydney Allan.



Kasebier – Portrait of Sadakichi Hartmann. Courtesy of UCR Special Collections.

Sadakichi Writes

Sadakichi is probably best known for his writing. He published nine books, 12 plays, three volumes of poetry, numerous pamphlets and articles, and a large collection of unpublished works. In the late 1890s, Sadakichi began writing what would become one of his pivotal works, a two volume set entitled, ***The History of American Art***, to this day required reading in most art history studies. Sadakichi's writings on art and artists reveal an insight that could only be expressed by someone who was an artist himself and possessed the intrinsic ability to assess art, both in the visual and written form. In 1906, he also co-founded the Mother Earth magazine.

Sadakichi did not accept or deny any one religion but he was fascinated with the philosophies of many religions and their central figures. Some of the historic religious subjects of his plays were; Jesus Christ, Confucius, Mohammad and Boston friend and neighbor Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science.

In 1893, Sadakichi published one of his first plays, "Christ." The play was considered heretical and most of the copies were confiscated and destroyed as Sadakichi spent the Christmas week of 1893, in jail in Boston.

"Oh, to be Sadakichi!", said Ezra Pound. "Oh, to squeeze every moment out of life and release some of the water from that overflowing well of ideas incessantly needing to be expressed!" If Sadakichi had lived in our time I believe he would have embraced every technology available to him to create his art. Creativity for him was like eating, drinking, sleeping.....things you didn't have to think about doing. It was always there for him. The only question was what medium he would express it in.

Sadakichi was a visionary. He was one of the first American poets to write in the Japanese haikai, dodoitsu and tanka forms before 1900. The structure of a tanka is five lines of poetry, the first being five syllables, the second seven, the third five, the fourth and fifth seven, for a total of 31 syllables. The following is an example of a tanka written by Sadakichi:

Moonshine! There is none

Springtime. Where are its flowers!

Spring seems to be gone.

All life is estranged, my love

Alone has remained unchanged.

He wrote plays that required lighting not yet invented. He performed “perfume” concerts to trigger olfactory responses and encouraged composers to write symphonic works for “electromagnetic music whose vibrations do not simulate orchestral instruments but open up horizonless vistas of pure sound.” This was an obvious prophetic vision of electronic music, synthesizers and later, digital sound creation and manipulation.

Sadakichi believed that the sense of smell was an unappreciated and underutilized art form that could be used to express certain moods. In 1902, he conducted a perfume concert in Paris with the aid of giant electric fans. His plan was to take the audience on “A Trip to Japan in Sixteen Minutes” with eight scents. The lack of advanced technology and the impatience of the audience resulted in him being booed off of the stage, however the endeavor was a testament to Hartmann’s creative and fertile imagination. He believed art had the ability to open other worlds to the listener, viewer, or reader. He tried other perfume concerts with similar results.

Sadakichi’s striking physical features reflected his eccentric personality. He became the most photographed and painted individual of his time. Painters, photographers and sculptors saw his mesmerizing face as a model ready to be captured in their art.

Sadakichi was also famous for the famous people he surrounded himself with. His wit, life experiences and observations, intellect, free spirited dancing, and occasional wild drinking assured the success of any party he attended from New York to Hollywood, from Paris to the San Geronio Pass. A partial list of some of his close friends and confidants includes; Walt Whitman, James Whistler, Ezra Pound, Franz Liszt, Thomas Hart Benton, George Santayana, Oscar Wilde, Henrik Ibsen, Charlie Chaplin, the Barrymore family, W.C. Fields, Will Durant, David Selznick, Marcel Proust, Elbert Hubbard, Douglas Fairbanks, Louis Mayer, John Burroughs, and Beaumont Mayor, Guy Bogart. Many of these luminaries visited Sadakichi when he moved to Beaumont in the 1920s and later to the Morongo Reservation in the 1930s. Sadakichi did not have a problem with self confidence and once proclaimed, “A man cannot help that other people do not think him as great as he considers himself to be.”

While searching for “lands of shadows and dreams” in his art (Hartmann poem), Hartmann was firmly anchored in and appreciative of this world. He believed in experiencing all that life had to offer and could be considered a sensualist, even a hedonist by some, partaking of every aspect of the human experience to its fullest. This earned him the reputation as the “King of Bohemia.”

His infamous hedonism was often tempered by ill health. Asthma and a severe hernia were his most constant maladies but he also suffered two serious accidents which resulted in broken ankles. Spending much of his life in pain he often chose the most available methods of deadening that pain. These methods led at times to excesses that took a physical and financial toll on the brilliant artist. To know you are a genius and to know that genius will lead you into

poverty because of your inability to compromise your brilliance begins to manifest itself and eventually determine your fate. At one time Sadakichi said of himself, "My ailments are exceeded only by my debts."

Sadakichi's place in the world of art and literature was well respected during the zenith of his artistic career. Those who knew him or even had a brief encounter with him never forgot his powerful, affecting presence. In the words of art critic Arthur Millier he describes the complexity of Sadakichi; "What you see is the mask, what you hear issuing from his throat in strange gutturals are the notes of wit and malice from a hidden soul. Under this graying crust is deep rooted sweetness and equally deep despair." Sadakichi spent his life perfecting his abilities to express these extremes of the human condition. Sadakichi was not only a great artist, he was a living work of art.

The second part of this article, ***Sadakichi and the San Gorgonio Pass*** will focus on Sadakichi's move to Beaumont in the 1920s, his relationship with Beaumont Mayor Guy Bogart, his final move to the Morongo Reservation in the 1930s, the building of his cabin, Catclaw Siding, his pastel paintings, and his love of Mt. San Jacinto.

Thanks to Wistaria Linton, Harry Lawton and George Knox in establishing the Sadakichi Hartmann archive at UCR's Special Collections Department. Special thanks to the Banning Public Library and its collection of books and newsletters by and about Sadakichi Hartmann. Thanks to Marigold Linton, Tyron Linton, Betty Meltzer, Gloria Bell, Gae Rusk, and David Heiss for his assistance in excavating the Guy Bogart Collection at the San Gorgonio Pass Historical Society.



Decker: *Sadakichi Hartmann, Portrait*, 1940 (Cat. No. 75)

Decker – Sadakichi Portrait, 1940. Courtesy of UCR Special Collections.

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