

In Search of Sadakichi Hartmann – Part Three

This is the third and final article about Sadakichi Hartmann. Part One covered a biography of his life before his arrival in the San Geronimo Pass. Part Two began with Sadakichi's life in Beaumont and ten years later his move to the Morongo Reservation. Part Three will cover the book, "Minutes of the Last Meeting," Sadakichi's afflictions and remedies, and the final years of his life.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

Gene Fowler's book, *Minutes of the Last Meeting*, was published in 1954, ten years after Sadakichi's death. The book depicts a group of artists; Sadakichi Hartmann, W.C. Fields (a surprising, near intellectual equal to Sadakichi), John Dexter, John Barrymore, and author Gene Fowler who would meet at artist John Dexter's house/studio on Bundy Drive in Brentwood, CA. Fowler referred to them as the "Bundy Drive Group." Occasional participants in these soirees were Anthony Quinn, Charlie Chaplin, and other Hollywood intellectuals and artists.

Minutes of the Last Meeting started out to be a biography written about Sadakichi Hartmann. It would be an understatement to call Fowler's depiction of Sadakichi as snarky. They were supposedly friends and it was Sadakichi's assumption that Fowler was writing a biography of him. Some payments were made from Fowler to Sadakichi but the biography was never finished. Fowler turned it into a bawdy account of the Bundy Drive Group.

The book sensationalized the debauchery of some of these meetings and depicted Sadakichi as a drunken moocher. Although Beaumont Mayor Guy Bogart didn't criticize Fowler's depiction of Sadakichi in *Minutes of the Last Meeting*, he felt that Fowler gave only a one sided view of Sadakichi's shortcomings and dramatically magnified those shortcomings. According to Guy Bogart, "If the drunken moocher Fowler portrays was all he could see in Hartmann, then the loss was Fowler's."

What grudges, if more than literary jealousy, Fowler had against Sadakichi can't be known and although an entertaining read, the book leaves the reader with a sickening feeling in its continual one-sided, boorish attack on Sadakichi. Perhaps Fowler was trying to capitalize on Sadakichi's notoriety and sensationalized his writing to sell more books.

The outcry from Pass residents was immediate as they rallied behind the Sadakichi they knew who had now passed away and was unable to defend himself. Former Librarian at the Beaumont Public Library, Mrs. George Lardner, was quoted as saying, "I have yet to meet anyone who knew Sadakichi well who isn't disgusted by Fowler's book." (Guy Bogart Archive, San Geronio Pass Historical Society)

"He never tried to bum money off of me. I never saw him drunk. He dropped by my home often for lunch. We discussed literature and he was a perfect gentleman. He wasn't a big talker, but when he said something it went straight to the mark." (Guy Bogart Archive)

Mrs. Lardner remembered Sadakichi working on a monumental book he titled, "Esthetic Verities." He worked on the 275,000 word manuscript between 1927 and 1932. Sadakichi read numerous chapters to Beaumont residents, usually at the Guy Bogart house. Bogart described the book as a "real masterpiece," and though unpublished thought it may be at the Bridgeway Library in Philadelphia, where Sadakichi worked on his first American art study.

One of Fowler's attacks on Sadakichi was his opinion that Sadakichi moved to the Morongo Reservation to "mooch off of the federal government." Guy Bogart vigorously denied Fowler's assertion. "It's true that Sadakichi lived off of an endless string of patrons," claimed Bogart. "I lent him hundreds of dollars in the 20 years I knew him and was never sorry, but to say he mooched off the government is an outrageous misrepresentation." (Guy Bogart Archive)

In an article by Harry Lawton he interviewed Paul Van Arx, a German speaking fruit grower in the Pass who became good friends with Sadakichi and helped him and his wife and children while they lived in Beaumont. "Yes, he borrowed money," said Van Arx, "but he was not a sponge. He was neither selfish or greedy. He liked people for themselves and not for handouts."

Sadakichi's daughter Wistaria Linton filed a \$600,000 plagiarism suit against Gene Fowler and the Viking Press in 1955, claiming that Fowler's book had copied much of Hartmann's original autobiographical manuscript without his permission. Fowler claimed that all the information in his book was obtained directly from conversations with Hartmann or from people connected to him.

Five months later the lawsuit was settled by the Banning law firm, Wing, Wing, and Brown for the amount of \$2500.00

Pain, Alcohol and Drug Theories

Sadakichi Hartmann spent the majority of his life in some kind of pain, most of it severe. Afflicted with asthma at an early age, one of the first remedies administered to Sadakichi and his brother Taru by a doctor in Japan was the smoking of stramonium (*datura*) leaves. Medicinal cigarettes were an accepted method for treating asthma until the mid 1900s. Sadakichi continued smoking a mixture of stramonium and other herbs most of his life. The *datura* plant grows readily in Southern California's deserts but I was unable to locate any research that identified the origin of Sadakichi's supply of stramonium laced medicinal cigarettes.

Convulsions caused by his asthmatic condition were so severe at times Sadakichi had to sleep standing up by tying himself to a wall. When describing his affliction Sadakichi said, "Dante should have included asthma as one of the severest punishments of hell." Today he would have been given inhalers and other asthma medications but in Sadakichi's time there were few remedies available.

At some point in his life he discovered relief from drinking whiskey or brandy. Sadakichi referred to this as his "daily moistening routine." One of Sadakichi's daughters theorized that he began drinking during his newspaper reporting days.

The asthmatic condition is susceptible to stress and is affected by alcohol. Many people suffering from asthma may have their symptoms worsen by drinking alcohol in the form of wine or beer because of the sulfites used in processing them. Hard liquor, on the other hand, is made with ethanol which may actually improve asthmatic symptoms in some by soothing the airways and making it easier to breathe. In one study 23.2% of asthmatic patients reported that brandy or whiskey made their asthma better, especially when their symptoms were extreme. (*National Center for Biotechnology Information publication, 1983*)

Along with his severe asthma Sadakichi suffered from a painful hernia that ultimately contributed to his death. He also had two broken ankles, one from a fall and one from an automobile accident. All of these ailments compounded the need for relief from his pain. In Sadakichi's pre-opioid world he medicated himself with what was available to him.

This is not an attempt to excuse Sadakichi's drinking to access, which by many accounts he did so during the course of his adult life, but it also is not a criticism of someone who was in intense pain, searching for ways to relieve that pain.



Sadakichi Hartmann at His Gate at Catclaw Siding, 1943. Photo Courtesy of UCR Special Collections.

Sadakichi's Last Projects and Ideas

Sadakichi continued mentoring young artists who sought him out for constructive criticism of their art. To be given an audience with a master art critic like Sadakichi, who might offer advice in what direction their art should take, was a revered lifetime opportunity. Giving lectures on art presented Sadakichi with the opportunity to discuss art with those who lingered after the lecture to be influenced by his insights.

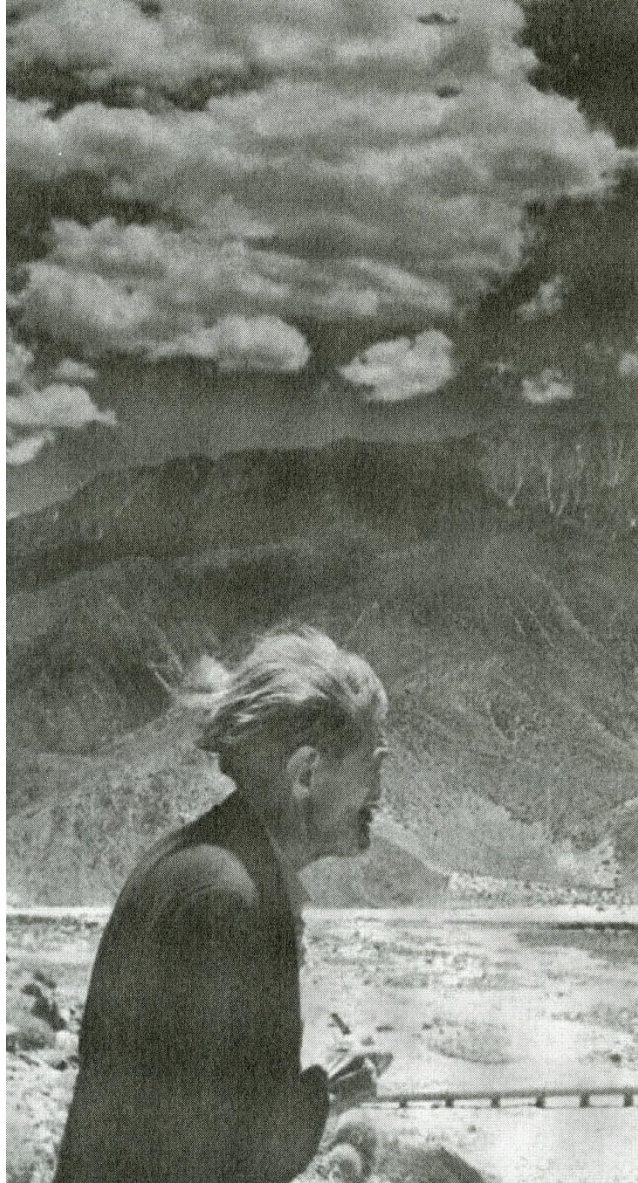
Sadakichi would often title a painting, photograph, book or poem before beginning it. He felt that titling the piece gave it a structure to build upon, leading to a more powerful expression and total freedom within that structure. He recommended this method to others seeking his opinions on their art.

In the 1930s Sadakichi saw the opportunity of advancing art through government sponsored programs. In a letter to Guy Bogart from Sadakichi while he was staying in Andover, New Hampshire in August of 1935, Sadakichi mentions spending several weeks in Washington D.C. exploring the possibility of getting a grant through the Art Relief program. His proposal was to get funding for the painting of three or four large murals on the campus of the Beaumont High School, which would be painted by Sadakichi. In his letter Sadakichi was enlisting Guy Bogart to contact the U.S. Treasury in support of the idea. Sadakichi's plan was for his project to hopefully become the first of several mural projects throughout Riverside County.

In another attempt to make a living through his experiences in art and to keep himself relevant in the art world Sadakichi sent out letters across the country in November of 1935, announcing his availability for lecturing. He believed that his vast experience as an art critic and author enabled him to make practical suggestions in any town he visited, tailored to the art wants of that locality. His lecture topics included: "Art As It Happens to Be," "What Are Politics Doing to Art?", "Picture Buying and Selling Techniques", and "Forty Years With American Artists."

The end of his letter reads: "As far as a fee is concerned, pay what you can afford as long as it takes care of my hotel bill and fare from place to place. If rightly handled I am still a drawing card." He signs the letter; Sadakichi Hartmann, Author of the first *History of American Art*. (Guy Bogart Archive) We can only imagine what an experience it would have been to attend an art lecture given by Sadakichi Hartmann! He undoubtedly gave some of these lectures at the Banning and Beaumont Woman's Clubs.

A letter to Bogart from Sadakichi dated Dec. 21, 1936, from Washington D.C. mentions he was convalescing but would head west as soon as possible because he "could live more cheaply in a place like Beaumont or Banning." He mentions that he had started writing his sixth and possibly last drama, this one on Mary Baker Eddy titled, "A Religion in the Making."



Sadakichi's Final Days at Catclaw Siding, by Cliff Wesselmann. Courtesy of UCR Special Collections.

Final Years at Catclaw Siding

Sadakichi's main ancestry was Japanese and German. His three grandchildren; Cedric, Marigold and Tyron, children of his daughter, Wistaria, were principally Japanese, German and Native American.

I asked Marigold Linton what it was like growing up knowing she was Sadakichi's granddaughter. She first remembers him during World War II which was a difficult time for her, caught between so many cultures. The white kids at school wouldn't play with her because she was Indian and the Indian kids wouldn't play with her because she was Japanese. Their use of derogatory names made matters worse.

Some of Sadakichi's friends saw his brilliance in Marigold and she fulfilled their observations by being "the first California reservation kid to ever leave the reservation and go to college." (quote from Marigold Linton) Dr. Marigold Linton became a cognitive psychologist and has been honored for her research at the University of Kansas and the Haskell Indian Nations University. She was only eight years old when Sadakichi died.

Tyron Linton (Sadakichi's grandson) doesn't remember his grandfather ever being involved with the Cahuilla/Native American culture while living at Catclaw Siding. By most accounts Sadakichi seemed to live only within his own inner world and culture while appreciating the beauty of the area and his unobstructed view of Mt. San Jacinto.

Sadakichi Hartmann somehow found enough funding to spend his final years traveling back and forth between the Morongo Reservation, the East Coast and Los Angeles. As his health deteriorated and his infirmities strengthened he felt most relevant in the company of his gang from Bundy Drive. Their occasional meetings started in the late 1930s and lasted until 1944. His visits with the Bundy Drive Group became less frequent as Sadakichi was winding down. His isolation and loneliness began to take their toll on the great Bohemian. The caption for one of the last photographs of Sadakichi taken of him leaning on the gate of Catclaw Siding reads: "Looking Down the Road For Visitors Who Do Not Come."

San Geronimo Pass residents are fortunate to have had such an important writer and artist live in the Pass and express its beauty as only a poet can. Sometimes it takes an artist to appreciate something we see every day and ignore. Sometimes it takes the words of a poet to awaken us to the beauty surrounding us. We get distracted by the commerce the San Geronimo Pass has drawn to it. When Sadakichi lived in the Pass there were few lights, no planned communities and no I-10 Freeway.

Ending his life in a self made shack on the Morongo Reservation was probably not something Sadakichi Hartmann ever imagined would happen to him. From the streets, salons and galleries

of Paris, New York and Hollywood he amazingly found his way to the San Geronimo Pass. After gracing numerous stages of the world throughout his life he found himself on a tiny, solitary one, gazing in wonderment at Mt. San Jacinto.

In November of 1944, the now 75 year old Sadakichi Hartmann traveled to St. Petersburg, Florida to visit his daughter, Mrs. Dorothy Gilliland. It was to be his last journey and he died soon after his arrival on November 21, 1944.

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