

Friedrich Ernst "Fred" Darge



Portrait of Fred Darge in 1952, 36" x 30", Oil on Canvas, By Ramon Froman, Collection of Ken and Elsie Duperry

INTRODUCTION

Writing a biography about the life of Fred Darge turned out to be more than an unexpected experience. Valid and documented information, both rarities, has come in small bits and pieces that have been accumulated over a great deal of time and research looking for anything that could lead to additional information. There is almost no personal information at all about Fred. No letters, no documents except for his naturalization papers, no diaries or journals. There have been many lost trails, box canyons and blind alleys. Fred likely did not intend for it to be this way even though his persona was widely known to be stoic, more an observer than a participant interacting with those around him. He possibly never entertained thoughts of his ascent to the status of an acclaimed and highly sought and respected Texas artist.

Fred is not the first, nor will he be the last, artist to leave his collectors wanting to know more about a very accomplished artist who painted his style of classic art. His works illustrate places that were important to him during his own time, suggesting a compelling need to record an era that he sensed would soon be markedly changing. Dramatic scenery of the tall and wide-open spaces of ranch lands, the urban environments and places to which he felt connected and the people who inhabited those spaces and places. All these elements caught his attention.

There are no contemporaries of Darge now living. We were successful in locating just four individuals -- Julia Nail Moss, Irene Vickers Burnham, Monroe Jess Walbridge and Marlene Cruce who actually knew and remembered him. Mrs. Moss vividly recalled pleasant childhood hours talking with Darge while he painted. Although Mr. Walbridge was quite young, he remembered Darge's summer visits to the Walbridge ranch. Mrs. Cruce and her husband, B. W., owned Southwestern Galleries in Mesquite, Texas and represented Darge in the 1970's.

In the late 1990s, David R. Darge, the son, and art dealer Richard Plumly of Fine Arts of Texas in San Antonio put together a biography that has served as the main source of information about Fred Darge for the past two decades. Additional information has been added by others. Even though Darge's son provided the basic information for the biography, extensive research of undocumented claims has been impossible to verify. It is sadly noteworthy to state that Fred did not have a very close relationship with his son. Apparently, there was nothing at all from the time David was around seven until he was a young adult when there is documentation of the two painting together during the summer of 1949 in Palo Duro Canyon. Certainly, a conundrum exists which continues still.

It is really only the legacy of Fred Darge's works and a few quotes or two from newspaper articles that offer any understanding of the artist as a person. And, it is these same resources that offer the tiny clues to the years that composed the life of Friedrich Ernst Darge.

FRIEDRICH ERNST DARGE: TEXAS ARTIST

MARCH 1, 1900 – JANUARY 14, 1923

Friedrich Ernst “Fred” Darge was born on March 1, 1900 in Rendsburg, Germany to Wilhelm and Ana Darge. Fred was the first of five children: Paul, Max, Emmy and Frida. Max died during World War II. ¹ Additional family information was sought, but not located. There is no other information regarding Darge’s childhood or education other than on the 1940 U.S. Census, he reported that he had finished “elementary school and 8th grade.” Additionally, the same document has Hamburg, Germany listed as his last city of residence before coming to America. ²

Rendsburg remains a small, inland town on the River Elder and the Kiel Canal in the central part of Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, south of the Danish-German border. Rendsburg, first mentioned in documents in 1199, has a long and interesting history. It was a part of Holstein in the 13th century and then of Schleswig in 1460 and over the next four centuries was passed between the two until the German-Danish War of 1864 when Rendsburg was finally seized by the Kingdom of Prussia and Austria. After 1865, the town was annexed by the Kingdom of Prussia and has since remained a part of Germany. ³

A few years prior to Darge’s birth, the Kiel Canal was completed and Rendsburg became an important addition to the German maritime industry. Large ships could navigate the canal and the town became an inland port and dockyard which connected to the Atlantic Ocean. ⁴ Nothing



Undated Photograph of Some Members of Darge Family. Fred's Mother and Father 2nd and 3rd from left. Photograph Provided by Eva Martina Friedrichsdorff, Great Niece of Fred Darge, Hamburg, Germany

is known about Darge’s parents, but noting that in the photograph of the Darge family, Mr. Darge is wearing the traditional sea-man’s pea coat worn for decades by European sailors. ⁵ It is possible that he was employed in some way by the maritime industry.

Having grown up in a navigable seaport and dockyard apparently tugged at the heart of

young Darge. There are some biographies that claim he joined the German Merchant Marines in 1916.⁶ As most boys of the time, by the age of 16, he had left formal education in favor of income and had entered into maritime employment, perhaps following in the footsteps of his father. It is plausible that he wondered about those ships that had traversed the world and conjured imagines of adventure that had been experienced by the sailors. Unquestionably, Darge's imagination and creativeness was active and interested in the world around him.

While in the merchant marines, Darge developed a keen interest and skilled ability in carving model ships and sail boats which were painted traditional maritime colors. Carving would become an integral part of his passion for art that would continue throughout his life. Once a ship is loaded and sets sail, most sailors have ample time for personal interest pursuits. Fred used his time to become very proficient as a master woodcarver and this art form was just as important as his painting. His skill in carving would eventually become the envy of many, both collectors of wood carvings and art collectors alike.

There were no records located of Darge's maritime travels; the name of the shipping company or companies for which he sailed and for ports in faraway lands where he may have gone ashore remain a mystery. Details of the six or seven years he was thought to be a deck hand in the German Merchant Marine are elusive except that he came to a Texas seaport where he decided to stay.

JANUARY 14, 1923 - 1933

Reportedly and according to Fred's U. S. Petition for Naturalization document, he landed in Port Arthur, Texas aboard the SS Alarich, a German flagged merchant ship ⁷ on January 14, 1923. Ship prefixes used on merchant vessels are mainly to point out the propulsion technique employed in the ship, such as the abbreviation "SS" means "steamship", indicating that the ship runs on steam propulsion. ⁸

No record of when he embarked on this journey or whether there were multiple stops before landing at the Texas port was located. There are no records to indicate whether Darge intended to stay in the U. S. before or while he was aboard ship or if he decided to stay when he arrived. In all probability, Darge earned his way to the States by his employment on the SS Alarich.

According to the biographical information compiled by David Darge and Richard Plumly, upon arrival in the U. S., Darge worked at multiple ranches in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California as a ranch hand before traveling to Chicago.⁹ There are differing versions of Darge's time from entering the U.S. to beginning studies at Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). Presumably David had heard this from his father. It seems more likely that Darge, facilitated by those representing him, added this scenario as an enhancement to his resume. Thus far, no records have been found that would validate how Darge spent the first eighteen months in his new country.

Where did Darge's ideas of where he wanted to go in Texas originate and then evolve? When did he travel, or did he even travel out of Texas during those first months in America, and where was his destination? Did he have a specific goal in mind? These questions and numerous others may well remain forever unanswered.

It is probably a safe assumption that Darge had been exposed to the exciting and glorified -- concept of the cowboy because of the long-held fascination in which Europeans, particularly Germans, placed on all the elements that comprised the mystique and romance of the American West.¹⁰ While there were Germans among the early Taos and Santa Fe artists as well as within the San Antonio group, including those that had attended the art institutes in New York and Chicago, by the early 1920s a number of American artists had been to Europe, especially France and Germany, for study purposes. It is plausible Darge had encountered either works by those artists or perhaps had met one of them by some circuitous route. Since he was interested in art, he could have been attuned to what was happening in European art circles, especially in his own country.

Concurrently, during the late 1800s and into the first several decades of the 1900s, a number of European artists were coming to America as they were seeking new and exciting subjects to portray on canvas. At the same time, a number of American artists were students at the acclaimed European art schools. It is entirely possible that Darge, having an interest in art as an artist had heard of those artists, including some of the early Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico groups, who were painting canvases filled with the intriguing people and unique landscapes of the American West and Southwest.

Additionally, during the last decades of the 1800s and forward to the time of Darge's arrival in the U. S., there were a number of very talented German master woodcarvers that came to America and were achieving great successes with their artistic endeavors. Most of these carvers initially settled in an area west of Houston to San Antonio and from there up into the Hill Country of Texas. The number of German immigrants increased dramatically during the last half of the 1800s and into the 1900s. Beginning in the early 1900s, German woodcarvers and craftsmen built some of the now famous Painted Churches of Texas which number more than twenty across the state. These churches are well known for their fabulous hand-painted sculptures, angels, filigree, faux marble and stencils.¹¹ It is quite plausible that Fred had known about those carvers and may have even met some of them.

Furthermore, the American Film Institute defines western films as those "set in the American West that embodies the spirit, the struggles and the demise of the new frontier." Western films were enormously popular in the silent film era from 1894-1927.¹² America's Western films achieved great success in Europe as well as with Americans in the eastern half of the USA, impressing movie goers with a lifestyle they could not imagine.

From the time that Darge arrived in Texas aboard the SS Alarich and his arrival in Chicago, there were no records of his whereabouts or activities. Whatever was behind his thinking of

where he would go or what he would do, it appears he made the right choice for furthering his artistic talents.

At some point, likely in mid-1924, Darge arrived in Chicago and settled into residency there. According to documentation in Darge's handwriting, he was enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) beginning on September 29, 1924 thru March 29, 1930. His study courses included drawing and portrait and figure painting.¹³



Art Institute of Chicago, Circa 1920's

Art student Darge was also a member of the Art Students League of Chicago, affiliated with the AIC. The League exhibited annually at the AIC from 1893 to 1944.¹⁴ It was an organization that all attending students were eligible to join. Although there are a number of Darge biographies on the internet and elsewhere that suggests he also attended the prestigious Art Students League of New York (ASL), the alumni department of ASL researched their files and found nothing to reflect this

claim.¹⁵

There is no known date of when Fred met Garnet Eleanor Baker, originally from Douglas County, Minnesota. A record of marriage could not be located. A son, David Ronald Darge was born on February 25, 1926.¹⁶

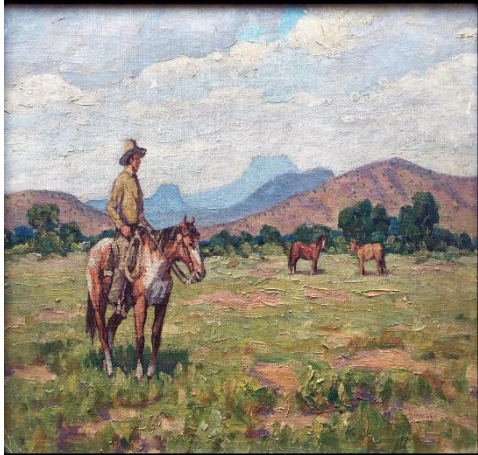
The first documented exhibit for Darge's work was at the 35th Annual Exhibition of the Arts Student's League of Chicago in 1928. The subject and all other information about the piece is unknown except for the title. "*Drying Sails.*"¹⁷ However, according to a newspaper article, "in



Untitled, Autumn Texas Trees, 16 x 18, Oil on Canvas, dated 1929, Signed Verso Top Right.

1928 and again in 1929 he was awarded the \$100 prize for an oil painting in the exhibition of the Union League Club, Chicago, the winning canvas being hung in two Chicago schools. And since that time, he has continued to exhibit in various Chicago showings...."¹⁸ There are no records of the titles of the two pieces.

Darge took two trips in the later years of the 1920s. The first was a driving tour with his family thru Minnesota and the Dakotas. Apparently, David had heard about this trip from his mother.¹⁹ The second trip, in the autumn 1929 was Darge's "first automobile tour of the west – and Texas and the Big Bend Country had won his heart completely." His



Early Darge Painting, Size Unavailable, Oil on Board, Circa 1929, Collection of Eva Maria Fredrichdorff, Aerzen, Germany

driving eventually took him back to San Antonio, a city that he found “colorful, picturesque and conveniently close to the ranch life he yearned to paint.” ²⁰

After completing the Texas trip, it is assumed that Darge returned to his job as a commercial artist and draftsman in Chicago. He likely also continued to paint and carve.

According to the 1930 U. S. Census, Darge stated to the census taker that he and Eleanor were married in 1926. The family is listed as residing at 1624 La Salle Street, Chicago, Illinois. Also reported on the census, in addition to four-year old David, are two other children living in the house: Eleanor, a two-year old girl, and Robert, a less

than one-year old boy. Fred is listed as a lithographer and Eleanor as working in “public education.” ²¹

Documentation of an exhibit that mentions Darge’s work was found in an article published in the Southtown Economist Newspaper (Chicago Tribune) on February 20, 1931. The 35th Annual Exhibition of Chicago Artists at the Art Institute of Chicago was to be held at the studio, 1546 East 57th Street. The Southtown students of the Huettl Art School were exhibiting their works during the week of February 28 and March 8. ²²

There were no records found regarding the listing of artists presenting works for the 36th Annual Exhibition of Chicago Artists at the Art Institute of Chicago, but the following year, in 1933, Fred’s painting, “Winter” is included in the exhibit. ²³

On March 17, 1933, a mention in the Hyde Park Herald reported “a wood carving, *The Bread Line*, by Fred Darge, 5452 Lake Park, was stolen from an exhibit in a loop Department Store last week.” ^{24 A}

At some point during the last half of 1933, Darge and Eleanor separated. The reasons why he left his family remain an unknown. One could guess that perhaps the depression might have necessitated seeking employment elsewhere. It has been reported that he left Chicago and drove to California before deciding that he would return to San Antonio. ^{24 B} Possibly Darge had thought that his future was to be a full-time artist and he felt called to Texas. San Antonio would be a good place to establish a home base.

At the time, San Antonio was widely recognized as the art center of Texas, and a place where a number of well-known artists, maintained residences. The San Antonio Art League, aided by other local organizations and the city, had diligently promoted and aggressively worked toward this recognition and was instrumental in opening the Witte Museum in 1926. The League’s next achievement was the highly successful Texas Wildflower exhibition of 1927-1929, in which

wealthy oilman, Edgar B. Davis of Luling, Texas awarded \$50,000 in cash prizes to artist of award-winning paintings. The dream of winning cash prizes of this size was enough to catch the attention of local artists. The cash awards were also attractive to numerous artists in other regions of Texas and distant as Taos, New Mexico. Undoubtedly, word of these prizes reached the art community in Dallas. The success of these prizes seems to have solidified San Antonio as the important city to the Texas art scene.²⁵

Additionally, another possible draw to the area was the large German population that had settled in Fredericksburg and surrounding area that extended both east and west, including San Antonio. The German immigrants had settled into cultural groups in the region from Galveston and Houston along the coast and up into central Texas and the hill country to the north and the west. Their communities were populated with hardworking business and agricultural people who succeeded in founding and developing towns and in farming and ranching activities. Among these citizens were a number of talented artists and craftsmen. It



Harry Anthony DeYoung, Untitled, 16 x 20, Oil on Canvas, Courtesy of Fine Arts of Texas.

would be expected that Darge would find some enjoyment in being around others from his homeland.

Upon his arrival in San Antonio, Darge rented a room at a boarding house, reportedly found employment and began to paint, no doubt adding the skills he had acquired at the AIC to his own talents to produce pieces for exhibits and to sell. Darge's address was 327 Augusta Avenue and he was employed as "frame worker" at the Collins Frame Shop.²⁶ His first exhibit at a Texas art museum was the *5th Annual Local Art Exhibit* at the Witte Museum in San Antonio.²⁷ The exhibition opened on September 2, 1934 with eighty-six artists, including Darge "among [the] new artists."²⁸ Mrs. Robert Onderdonk, curator of art for the Witte, was very pleased with the attendance and interest shown in the art. It was noted that Darge's paintings attracted a lot of attention.²⁹

During his time in San Antonio, Darge met Harry Anthony DeYoung who was a 1917 graduate of the Art Institute of Chicago. DeYoung had founded the DeYoung School of Art in San Antonio in 1929³⁰ and was active in the local art community. The friendship they formed appears to have been mutually respectful and pleasant. Darge and DeYoung painted together at the Burnham ranch in the Big Bend in 1941³¹ DeYoung had traveled extensively in the Big Bend and Trans-Pecos area of Texas. Undoubtedly, Darge heard and learned a lot about the Big Bend and instinctively knew that was where he wanted to paint. The rugged and heroic land tested the human capacity for survival but all these elements of the American West made Darge's love of the land and its people a lifelong adventure – it was destined to become Darge's land, a land that he would continuously visit for the remaining years at his easel.

The next document found mentioning Darge's participation in an art exhibit, is the Artists' Fair held during San Antonio's Fiesta Week in late March of 1935 at Travis Park. Darge was recognized "as among the well-known artists whose work will be seen at the fair."³² Five months later in August, he participated in a for a four-day exhibit of his paintings held at King William Park located at 111 Washington Street. No sponsor or organizer was mentioned.³³

LATE 1935 – 1942

After approximately two years in San Antonio, Darge decided to move to Dallas. The rationale behind this decision is unknown, but it seems plausible to assume there were probably several reasons, primarily economic. Not only did San Antonio have a recognized and well-established art community, there were also a large number of artists who made the city their home base. Additionally, during the winter some of the famed Santa Fe and Taos art colonies' members resided there to enjoy mild winters. Perhaps the competition was a factor. Maybe he felt his style of art would be more attuned to patrons in Dallas.



Frank Reaugh, Undated Photograph

The art scene during this era could have been a major influence. Artist Frank Klepper had moved from McKinney to Dallas in 1927. He had been actively promoting art and art education in the city. He organized exhibitions of regional artists and taught art at the Southwestern School of Fine Art in public schools. Klepper also taught groups and private students. In 1930 Klepper founded the Klepper Sketch Club for local artists which normally met monthly to learn and to exhibit members' art.³⁴ He tirelessly worked to broaden the scope of Texas regional art. Darge was an active member of this group, presenting programs and demonstrations and showing in the club's exhibitions.³⁵

During this same timeframe, artist Frank Reaugh had lived in Dallas since moving from Terrell in 1890. Over the next more than six decades of his life, Reaugh had been another strong advocate for the arts in a city that had developed into an important metropolitan center in Texas by the 1930s. He promoted the establishment of an art museum beginning in the early 1900s and students studied under his tutelage, many of whom would become renowned artists. Reaugh had gained recognition as an excellent artist who had likely been the only professional artist who painted the storied Texas cattle drives while herds were being trailed to markets in other states. In February of 1929 Reaugh opened his new studio in Oak Cliff, which he named El Sibil. His dream for El Sibil was that it would become an art education center.³⁶ Reaugh and Darge apparently shared a mutual interest in painting a life style they saw slipping away as ranching and agricultural practices of the time were overtaken by modern

machines and practices. It would seem logical that they might have painted together, but no information regarding this has been located, even though they were acquainted.

By the time Darge came to Dallas, through Reaugh's promotion and work with art collectors and those interested in the arts, art was an integral part of the culture of a city that appeared to be only slightly affected by the Great Depression. The leaders of the city were planning great events for the upcoming 1936 Centennial that involved many new buildings at the State Fair grounds.³⁷ It was believed the world would be brought to the city and images of being recognized as sophisticated was a coup for those who promoted the city as thoroughly modern. Even so, Dallas was considered a real western city while San Antonio was often more identified with Mexico and the south Texas culture.

Additionally, the Centennial planners had economics and cultural enrichment in mind and they were confident the event would be beneficial to Dallas. "The Texas Centennial began as an advertisement campaign to encourage more investment in the state. As the nation struggled through the Great Depression, planners of the Texas Centennial Celebration depicted Texas as a land of opportunity and second chances, playing off of colorful and romantic Texas myths already made popular by fictional Western movies and books. Photographers and journalists joined in, promoting images of cowboys, cowgirls, and ten-gallon hats. Through these efforts, Texas was deliberately aligned with "the West," distancing the state from the lingering remnants of the Confederacy and its Southern identity." ³⁸

At the time, the regional modernists were very active and highly promoted in art circles. Although Darge's style was traditional with a slight hint of impressionistic influence, he likely thought that Dallas art patrons might relate to his paintings of western landscapes and the genre of western life more than those living in San Antonio.

The Dallas Museum of Fine Art, founded in 1903 as the Dallas Art Association,³⁹ was solidly established as supporters of local artists. The DMFA organized almost continuous group and individual exhibitions and both juried and non-juried shows. Undoubtedly, having works shown at the DMFA was an important milestone for Darge. Even though the Lawrence Art Galleries and Joseph Sartor Galleries seemed to represent and promote Darge with numerous exhibits, being included in museum showings expanded his audiences to a broader number of collectors and art enthusiasts.

The Dallas Nine, a group of artists of multiple medias, had become an entity that represented the Dallas Regionalist movement. The group was active during the 1930s and early 1940s. Artist Jerry Bywaters evolved as the primary leader and speaker for the group that included Otis Dozier, Florence McClung, Alexandre Hogue and Lloyd Goff, among others, who "flourished during a period when critics and theorists.....exhorted American artists to draw inspiration from their surroundings instead of following European trends." ⁴⁰ The modernism movement was stylistically different and many of those artists were depicting current urban scenes. Darge

was dedicated to painting the colorful, vibrant Texas and Southwest landscapes, rural ranch life and the daily lives of unique people that he found intriguing.

Judging from an overview of Darge's works, it does not appear that he was overly concerned about this regionalist movement. His more realistic style of recording life scenes of the areas where he painted was definitely his calling and he was loyal to himself as an artist and as a person. It seems that Darge was at peace with himself when painting horses and people of the West; those that were living during a transition time between the Old West and the era of modern agricultural practices and lifeways.

The Great Depression (1929-1939) had taken its toll on the life and culture of America. By the middle of the 1930s, it can be safely assumed that people were tired of the daily struggles and some found respite in again enjoying ventures into the arts. In 1930, Dallas was growing and the economy was boosted by construction and the East Texas oil industry. Dallas had become the oil center for Texas and Oklahoma and a financial and business center.⁴¹ The city was attracting people who were relocating from other, more affected parts of the country and from rural America. The interest in the arts had been broadened with the introduction of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) by President Franklin D. Roosevelt with Executive Order 7034 issued on May 6, 1935.⁴² The WPA program extended to 1943, providing numerous improvements and enhancements across the country. To the nation's artists, it was often a means of survival. Although it is widely reported that Darge participated in the WPA program, there is no documentation to validate this claim.

Oddly, a number of art historians, dealers and collectors believe that some of the finest American art of the 20th century was produced during the Great Depression. The creation of the WPA program was likely a factor challenging artist to produce their best quality works.

Fred Darge was constantly active in painting and marketing his work throughout the Depression. Perhaps it was in Dallas that he thought he would find art patrons who appreciated his art, both in style and in subject content.

In late 1935, whatever the reasoning behind the move, Darge relocated to Dallas, renting a room in the Oak Cliff section of the city. This move eventually resulted in being a turning point and a new start in a promising career as an artist. When Darge moved to San Antonio from Chicago he found a job working in a frame shop. One would expect that once he arrived in Dallas, he set about looking for employment to help sustain his living expenses. Careful searching did not reveal his success at finding employment, either part or full-time. It is generally believed the Joseph Sartor Gallery exhibited Darge's paintings during the last several months of 1935, but no references could be found to validate this claim.

Dallas would become his home base of operation for the next forty-three years of his life. In art circles, Darge became a well-liked and popular person with the other artists of his time. He painted, traveled, worked and shared his talents with his contemporaries as well as with students who enjoyed painting as a hobby or perhaps wanted to become artists themselves.

He presented programs to study clubs and organizations with members who were generally interested in art period. He often assisted in organizing art shows and served as a juror. Apparently Darge enjoyed being active with anything that was connected to art.

The year of 1936 must have been a very busy time for Darge. The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted a show January 3rd- January 9th that featured self-portraits of twenty-seven Dallas artists. These artists “have taken themselves lightly, overly seriously or humorously enough to make the show of unusual interest.” ⁴³ The image of himself that Darge rendered on canvas was considered to be “interesting either for likeness, good painting or unusual approach.” ⁴⁴ Surprisingly, this exhibit was more popular with viewers than had been anticipated by the museum. It is interesting to note that the traditional, conservative techniques that Darge used to apply paint to canvases can be seen in this painting-surely it must have been the way he truly saw himself.

The big event in Texas for the year 1936 was the Texas Centennial Exposition. There were multiple events in every section of the state that celebrated 100 years of Texas’ independence, beginning in Gonzales during November of 1935.⁴⁵ “The official \$25,000,000 central exposition, occupying fifty buildings and billed as the first world’s fair held in the Southwest, opened in Dallas on June 16, 1936. It had a dual theme: history and progress.” ⁴⁶ The Centennial celebration in Dallas was attended by 6,345,385 ⁴⁷ people; the total population of Texas that year was 6,192,000.⁴⁸

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts moved into their new building at the state fair grounds and very carefully planned opening exhibits that would be of interest to those attending. The jury of museum directors from Houston and New Orleans and Dallas artist, Alexandre Hogue had met in January, 1936 and selected 184 pieces from Texas artists to represent the state; 56% were Dallas artists. The selected pieces were divided between the new Hall of State building where approximately thirty pieces were placed as originally planned, the remaining in the new museum building. The established policy had been to accept one painting from each artist, however, the jury elected to not be limited by that and some artists had several entries. There were a number of new artists chosen, Darge ⁴⁹ among the group and his *Open Air Gospel* was exhibited for the very publicized Texas Centennial Exposition. ⁵⁰ What an exciting time it must have been for him – the affirmation of being chosen for this important event and of number of people who would view his work could have been more than he ever imagined.

The Lawrence Art Galleries owners Harry Lawrence and son, Joseph Lawrence began an important relationship with Darge at some point, plausibly shortly after his arrival in Dallas. Darge’s relocation to Dallas was fortuitous in a number of ways, including developing an artist-dealer relationship with their gallery, a gallery of influence at the time. Quite possibly, it was the Lawrence’s that made the connection for Fred to sell small paintings at Neiman-Marcus.

In the summer of 1936, Darge’s miniature paintings of the Big Bend were shown at Neiman-Marcus. During this era, major department stores in large cities were promoting and selling



original works of art in their home furnishings or decorative arts galleries. The fact that Darge had been residing in Dallas about a year and his works were being sold at Neiman-Marcus surely must have been euphoric for Darge as it was a monumental achievement. Although the works were small, they were framed and ready to be immediately enjoyed at home or given as gifts. Unfortunately, there is no record regarding the number of these pieces that sold.

A search of Texas newspapers revealed two Neiman-Marcus ads that featured Darge's small

paintings:

"Have you seen the paintings (oils) of Fred Darge now on display in the Ervay Street window and in the decorative Galleries, Fourth Floor? A variety of Typical Texas scenes, including a colorful group painted on location in the Chisos Mountains. In smart white shadow box frames." ⁵¹ June 17, 1936

"Fred Darge made a real contribution to the world when he got out his oil paints And put western lore so authentically and so colorfully upon tiny squares of Canvas. We had these little gems framed in off white, rimmed in a bit of color and the effect is something to send back from the Southwest if you are a Centennial visitor, something to treasure at any rate. \$3.50 In the Decorative Galleries at Neiman-Marcus. ⁵² August 10, 1936

The new year of 1937 began with an exhibit of "Farm Life" ⁵³ at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, in the 8th Annual Allied Arts Exhibition from January 17th through February 14th. ⁵⁴ Darge's two other entries in this exhibit were *Late Afternoon* and *East Texas Landscape*.⁵⁵

Following this event, on April 5, the Lawrence Art Galleries opened a show that included twelve large canvases that featured southwestern scenes. *Ridin' a Hard One* was "one of the artist's series..." ⁵⁶ It was noted that overall impression of the selections was "a calm wholesomeness about them like a breath of fresh mountain air. Darge is an able painter and a delightful colorist, the clear blues which he uses being particularly pleasing." ⁵⁷ Once he had been to the Big Bend and painted there, the Chisos Mountains and its people totally captured his heart and imagination of a life in which he longed to live. The painting, *Partners*, although painted several years later in 1939, readily illustrates this yearning to be part of the ranching lifestyle. A reviewer stated that Darge's specialty "is the West and this he has managed to depict with great skill." ⁵⁸

What Darge expected of his move to Dallas will be forever unknown, but as luck would have it, he somehow received an invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Waddy T. Burnham, Jr., well known for their generous hospitality, to paint at their ranch in the Big Bend. The initial connection possibly could have been Harry Anthony DeYoung while Darge was living in San Antonio. It can

be rationally assumed that Darge had heard about and painted there during the summers of 1934 and 1935. Although there is no documentation of that assumption, the paintings that he exhibited in 1936 and 1937 were definitely Big Bend subjects and landscapes. Whatever the route of introduction to Big Bend ranches and at whatever point in time, once Darge had been there and painted, the Chisos Mountains and its people totally captured his heart and imagination of a life in which he longed to live. The painting, *Partners*, although painted several years later in 1939, readily illustrates this yearning to be part of the ranching lifestyle.

Toward the end of May, Darge left Dallas for a summer excursion to paint in the Big Bend. He had plans to paint at the Burnham ranch.⁵⁹ As is the way of neighbors in remote locations, especially during that era, word quickly spread and he also received invitations from the Homer Wilsons, the Sam Nails and the Lucius "Lou" Buttrills. Occasionally, he visited other ranches in the area for shorter stays. It must have been a time that he was undoubtedly inspired by the increasing exposure in the art market and the success he was experiencing while his skills as an artist were improving. His professional career as an artist had finally found footing in the Big Bend; he had been recognized in exhibits as being accomplished as an artist who excelled at presenting the working ranchman and family going about their daily chores of earning a living. For at least six years, Darge's annual trips to these ranches would produce paintings that recorded the stories of not only these families, but also the real life of the era, a life that seemed to have stood still in a capsule of time. Clearly Darge was painting scenes that he loved, feeling that he was recording on canvas a lifeway that few truly lived and that would soon be changing.

Darge brought refinement to an area of Texas that normally didn't have time for art or much culture until he introduced them to his images on canvas. These people usually took for granted the uniqueness of their time and place. Seeing the magic he produced, undoubtedly inspired a special appreciation of their lives. Ranch owners enjoyed seeing his distinctive art work of landscapes and of themselves pictured with their family and friends. They gladly accepted these beautifully rendered paintings that had been painted on their ranch with family and friends as payment for his room and board. Despite his reticent personality he was always remembered as pleasant and people repeatedly welcomed him back to their homes and ranches so he could continue his painting.

"I believe the simple, direct living of the pioneer people will soon come to an end. The Big Bend Country, with its abundance of beauty, is one of the few places where hardy pioneer people carry on as their forefathers. Remington and Russell left numerous dramatic canvases depicting the pioneers' struggle to conquer nature, wild beasts and the red man."

"I want to register the ranchman as he lives today, his daily habits, his mode of living and doing business, before this part of the country gives way to progress and the civilization of the big cities, which today, in many instances, has taken the romance out of the West, paved roads instead of trails,

automobiles instead of horses."

"The paintings in this exhibition show life in that space of grandeur between the Davis Mountains and the Rio Grande River, known as the 'Big Bend Country' in Texas." -- Fred Darge ⁶⁰

Also, in 1937, Darge's tenacity and dedication to his art was rewarded with what must have been the best news he had ever heard in regard to his art. R. E. Griffith of Dallas, the owner of a large chain of movie theaters, R. E. Griffith Theaters, Inc., located in Dallas, opened the El Rancho Hotel in Gallup, New Mexico. The new hotel was located on the legendary Route 66. ⁶⁵ Griffith had decided to designate a gallery room for a "permanent exhibition" of Darge's paintings. ⁶⁶ The new gallery would not be completed until the next year. Darge would have ample time to produce paintings that would fill the walls in the new venue. "In view of the proximity of Taos and Santa Fe and their groups of artists this is [an] honor indeed!" declared a local art critic. ⁶⁷ That same article noted that Darge's "works had been shown in Tulsa [Oklahoma] and in Longview [Texas]. Requests have come from Chicago.....and later in the spring two of his big paintings will be exhibited at the Ferargil Galleries in New York." ⁶⁸ It has been assumed that Mr. Griffith was likely a client of Joseph and Harry Lawrence and was introduced to Darge's work through the Lawrence Art Galleries.

While wintering in Dallas and spending summers painting at the various ranches in the Big Bend as well as in New Mexico and other locations, Darge produced hundreds of paintings, both large and small throughout the rest of his career. His work was soon given a great boost and he was represented by other prominent Dallas art dealers, including Joseph Sartor Galleries, who were very active in hosting exhibits. The local press often wrote complimentary comments and articles about Darge's art. The dealers, through their advertising in the Dallas Morning News and Dallas Times Herald, were able to get the name "Fred Darge" out to the public and to create the much-needed name recognition. Even though diligence and endurance began to produce success, Darge's quest, as always, was to improve his art.

1938

The year of 1938 started off on a high note on January 1st when Darge was asked to exhibit paintings in the Majestic Theater in conjunction with showing the newly released film, *Wells Fargo*, starring Joel McCrea. The list of eight paintings exhibited at the theater included Range Gossip, Water Hole, Pack Train, The Big Divide, Night on the Range, In the Corral, Coming Home, and *Going to Town*. ⁶⁹ The theater was owned by R. E. Griffith of Dallas and his chain, the R. E. Griffith Theaters, Inc. The support of Griffith was no doubt important to Darge as it gave him a much broader audience, both locally and further west.

The 9th Annual Dallas Allied Arts Exhibition was held at the Dallas Museum of Arts from March 20 through April 17, 1938. Darge was included in that event. ⁷⁰

Although no records were found indicating that Lawrence Art Galleries hosted an annual exhibit for Darge in 1938, a lengthy and incomplete newspaper clipping without a source or date seems to indicate there might have been one.⁷¹ An exhaustive search was conducted to trace this article, but it could not be located. It is certainly an article that was written by an art critic familiar with Darge and his art. The writer states, "His various activities are recorded with the faithfulness of a biographer, the accuracy of an historian and the perspicacity that only an artist has."⁷²

Some paintings listed in the unidentified newspaper article are *Branding, Busting a Bad One, Water Hole, Pack Train, Range Gossip, Night on the Range, In the Corral, Going to Town and Going Home*. The author of the article concluded that, "[t]here are no imaginary creatures he is drawing, but real flesh and blood people, cows and horses. His subjects are the "hands," cattle and ponies on the Burnham ranch and their neighbors near Marathon in the Big Bend country."⁷³

Undoubtedly, due to the relationship with the Lawrence Art Galleries, Darge became much better known and recognized as an up and coming artist. During this time, he was painting larger canvases than usual and dealers and collectors alike thought these pictures were his finest works. His affiliation with Joseph Sartor Galleries was equally beneficial.

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted their 1st No-Jury Exhibition with a May 12, 1938 opening, closing on May 29th. Darge submitted a painting to be included in the exhibit of ninety-six pieces, one each for artists represented in the show. It was noted that a number of well-known artists presented works, including Darge.⁷⁴

On May 24, Darge shipped sixteen large canvases to the El Rancho Hotel in Gallup, New Mexico for the formal opening of the new gallery on Wednesday, June 1. The gallery was housed in a separate adobe building adjoining the hotel. The initial exhibition was primarily composed of pieces completed at the Big Bend and included "*Range Gossip, Big Divide, Grazing on the Chisos, Water Hole, Chuck Wagon, Back Yard Corral, Pack Train, Busting a Bad One, and Branding – Burnham Ranch*."⁷⁵

The new El Rancho Hotel Gallery was formally opened on June 1.⁷⁶ Sadly, all of the hotel's historical records and documents were sold in an auction in 1983.⁷⁷ However, one can easily imagine the excitement in Gallup with the new hotel and now the art gallery. Hotel guests viewed scenes typical to western lifeways and landscapes that were conjured from scenes in western films. The gallery "was built especially to carry out the pioneer spirit which imbues Mr. Darge's scenes of ranch life in West Texas."⁷⁸ The exhibit's paintings would be changed occasionally, according to Harry Lawrence.⁷⁹ It is also interesting to note that "a number of the canvases will be sent to Chicago in the fall for an exhibition of Darge works at the Anderson Galleries."⁸⁰

It is important to realize why Gallup was selected by Griffith. While no facts were discovered to attest to what R. E. Griffith's rationale was, one can surmise that with the increase of

convenient automobile travel, the building and availability of Route 66 and the advances of travel by new, more comfortable trains, people wanted to see the sights of their country. Even though the Great Depression was still a fact of American life, many people were managing to enjoy some pleasure activities and travel was a popular pastime.

Gallup has always been an important place to the northern border region of New Mexico and Arizona, providing goods and services for an extensive area. During that time, the highly promoted Route 66 was the major connection for vehicles between Chicago and Los Angeles. Gallup was also served by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. Fred Harvey opened the El Navajo Harvey House in 1923 to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of tourists and other travelers.⁵ Gallup was frequently the key link for those who wanted to experience the sites and adventures of the West, including the Native American pueblos and reservations, the



Monument Valley

cliff dwellings of the ancient peoples of the past and the wonders of places such as Petrified Forest National Park, the Painted Desert National Park, Monument Valley and the unbelievable grandeur of the Grand Canyon.

By the 1930s, filmmakers were filming movies on location and Monument Valley and the surrounding area was one of the premier places for the westerns that were producing famous movie stars and creating a loyal following of fans for Western films. The early movies partly filmed in Monument Valley are: The Vanishing

American in 1925, The Lone Ranger in 1929 which was the first sound movie filmed in Arizona, and Stagecoach in 1938.⁸² Famous directors, including John Ford, and actors, including John Wayne, were constantly in the area filming movies for moviegoers around the world who had a voracious appetite for the heroes and the romance of the American West.⁸³

R. E. Griffith's older brother, D. W. Griffith, was a prominent director, producer and writer of movies. Plausibly, R. E. Griffith's notoriety in the film industry brought many people to the El Rancho Hotel. The elder Griffith undoubtedly assisted his brother with contacts and promotion of the hotel. In addition to John Ford and John Wayne, there were many other actors and actresses that stayed at the El Rancho, including Ronald Reagan, Joel McCrea, William Holden, Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster.⁸⁴ The gallery would introduce an entirely different group of people to the art of Fred Darge.

Since Darge didn't leave a journal or any other information that recorded his trips around Texas and the Southwest, no documents have surfaced that indicate the various part of New Mexico to which he traveled. It is quite possible that he traveled west to Gallup, but that will remain an unknown, at least for now. One must hope that Darge did indeed visit the El Rancho to see the special gallery that Griffith had built for his art.

Darge was included in an exhibit in Oklahoma City at the Municipal Auditorium of the Federal Art Center. An exhibition of Southwestern artists had been arranged by Ann Sheets, the center's director.⁸⁵

1940

According to the 1940 U. S. Census, Darge lived at 1826 Park Avenue in Dallas. He reported he lived alone and was an artist. Garnet Eleanor Darge is listed in the census as a single head of household, living in Chicago with only one child, David, 14 years old.¹⁰⁶ The listing does not include the other two children reported in the 1930 census, Eleanor and Robert, ages 12 and 9 respectively, at the time of the 1940 census.

On April 6, 1940 the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (DMFA) announced that one-man shows of Dallas artists would be presented during the 1940-1941 season. Among the thirteen artists that responded they had works ready to show was Darge. The artists' names would be drawn to determine the order of presentation. These special showings would be for the duration of two weeks, including three Sundays and would be scheduled at intervals throughout the season.¹⁰⁷

The Eleventh Annual Allied Arts Show at the DMFA was on exhibit during April. Darge's painting, *Sheep Herder* was well received. "Distinguished for its thoughtful composition and skillful use of color, this work is one of the few conservative pieces included in an exhibition composed almost entirely of the works of the young moderns."¹⁰⁸ The positive response to his work must have been a source of pleasure for Darge. The regional modernists were seemingly garnering most of the attention and even Frank Reaugh had expressed frustration with Dallas art circles.¹⁰⁹ However, Darge's response to the competition will not be known. His work illustrates the fact that he continued to paint the West that he was witnessing. Instinctively, he seems to have known the role that his works would have in the future and recording a moment in time in a distant, desolate and demanding land that competed for its place in the world was his total focus.

More good news arrived for Darge. In April he had been notified that two of his oil paintings, *Roping a Stray* and *Summer in the Big Bend* had been selected for the spring exhibition at the Philadelphia Art Alliance Exhibition.¹¹⁰ Apparently he had entered these pieces in the exhibit and he undoubtedly must have been very pleased they were accepted.

On April 14, 1940 a newspaper article announced that "[f]rontier and cowboy paintings by Fred Darge of Dallas will line the walls of the Variety Club rooms in the Hotel Adolphus during the Variety Clubs' national convention here Thursday through Saturday. The one-man show was arranged by the Lawrence Art Galleries."¹¹¹

The non-juried show at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts opened on Thursday, June 6, 1940. This exhibit had a total of seventy-two pieces, an even dozen more than the prior year, with each artist limited to one painting. Darge was considered to be one of the more conservative

talents of the show.^{112 A} *Horse Wrangler* was the selected Darge painting exhibited in the show.^{112 B}

Darge continued his normal work schedule in 1940. Beginning in May, he visited in the Big Bend. Splitting his time between the Wilsons, the Burnhams and the Nails, he painted and sketched activities of those families and their ranch hands, the ranches' buildings and the landscapes surrounding these places.

An upcoming exhibit at the Joseph Sartor Galleries in Dallas managed to attract the attention of Louise Long, an art critic for the Dallas Morning News. The exhibit would be several major works by the acclaimed western artists of the day - Remington, Sharp, Couse and Dunton. Considering the examples of *Western art* of those artists, the Taos group and the Texas group, Ms. Long mused about trying to define and rationalize Western art as its own genre but declared that what had been labeled *Western art* was undergoing a change.¹¹³

While the early Taos painters were contemporaries of Remington, they were considered painters who painted the ideal, the romantic vision of the West, the fantasy. These New Mexico artists were also the "poet painters" – painting the drama, the romance and newly recognized as *regionalists*.¹¹⁴ During this time, the Dallas Nine had established a regional modernist style, but several Texans, including Fred Darge and Frank Reaugh, were quite satisfied being recognized for the skilled execution of works produced in their traditional, conservative style. All these artists were referred to as *Western* artists.

Paul Parker, director of the Colorado Springs Arts Center (CSAC), curated the Fifth Annual Exhibition of Paintings by artists west of the Mississippi at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Museum.¹¹⁵ The exhibition was at the CSAC during the late summer and early fall. Thirty Texas artists were selected for this exhibit, included Darge and Reaugh. Parker expressed the thought that the West was too large, too "disparate a landscape and human influence" to have been able to create a Western genre. He points out that perhaps some regionalism has been established because of artists in the same locations being considered *regional* due to being in a group that painted in similar styles.¹¹⁶

Wondering about what Darge's thoughts were during this point of time could conjure various ideas of plausible reactions. One scenario is that he might have been quite frustrated with the art market – it was in a time of transition when many art buyers were looking seriously at regionalism simply because it was the *new* artistic expression. The era was one when the depression was ongoing and the economy and finances were of great concern, the future uncertain. China and Japan were at war in Asia. The United States had not yet entered the war in Europe, although concern was never far away from American's minds. The geopolitical status both at home and abroad served as a distraction that caused people to focus more on immediate needs and concerns. Art would have to wait. Most likely Darge was not selling the number of paintings he wanted to sell.

Considering the era and that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had set aside the week of November 25 to December 1, 1940 as the National Week of Art, it appears that artists were indeed experiencing obstacles that impeded their futures. The intent was to promote investment in the contemporary art being produced by American artists. "Reliable authorities estimate that there are not more than 150 artists who earn more than \$2,000 a year through their art alone."¹¹⁷ It was noted that art could not survive without the support of those who collect it and enjoy talking about it and viewing it.¹¹⁸ It seems readily apparent that President Roosevelt, who had endorsed his belief in the importance of art by the WPA program and its support of art and artists, realized that government alone could not continue to support the arts as in the immediate past years.

Although there are no records to indicate the number of paintings that Darge sold during his lifetime, most likely he was not selling the number of pieces he wanted to sell. These factors and others seemed not to have been a deterrent to Darge's enthusiasm because he continued to paint the West as he saw it. His style was one that he no doubt felt most comfortable painting. His colors evolved somewhat, becoming a little softer over time, but basically, Darge's paintings were all definitive by style, colors and subjects. His tenacity of painting the ranchers as he saw them and the knowledge that soon the old ways would be gone seems to have always been thoroughly ingrained in his thinking.

During the fall of 1940, Darge's art could have been viewed at multiple exhibitions. The El Rancho Hotel Gallery reportedly had "hundreds" of paintings on exhibit.¹¹⁹ On October 5, the Lawrence Art Galleries opened a showing of "ranch life paintings in the Big Bend by local artist, Fred Darge will be featured in the exhibition of Western art..."¹²⁰ This exhibition was a special show that would be on display during the State Fair of Texas. "Darge has seven new canvases: *Leaving Town*, *Taking a Stray Home*, *Roping a Steer*, *Breaking a Bad One*, *Roundup*, *Chuck Wagon*, and *On the Mesa*."¹²¹ These paintings were "distinguished by [the] careful execution and rich, clean color."¹²²

Concurrently, Darge exhibited at the 11th Annual Allied Arts, Pan American Exposition that had opened on October 5th and had been presented by the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts at the State Fair of Texas. Art critic Louise Long listed Darge as being among the artists that submitted paintings that were considered "eminently competent."¹²³

Each of the last two months of the 1940, Darge participated in exhibits. He was one of four Dallas artists included in the Texas Fine Arts Circuit Exhibition which opened on November 24th at the Round House Gallery of Art, North Texas Agricultural College in Arlington.¹²⁴

The following month, in December, Darge and fellow Dallas artist, Olin Travis, were featured in an exhibition of paintings of early French, English and German paintings and contemporary American works. The Women's Department Club, a nonprofit organization focusing on improving the local community,¹²⁵ with the aid of Harry Lawrence of the Lawrence Art Galleries had made the arrangements for this showing in Shreveport, Louisiana.¹²⁶

1941

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts ushered in the schedule of exhibitions for 1941 with the Texas Fine Arts Exhibition on January 15th. Twenty-nine artists from eleven Texas cities participated. Art critic Louise Long credits Darge's oil painting, *Late Afternoon*, as one of the best works in his Big Bend series. ¹²⁷

The following month, on February 13th, Darge participated with ten other artists in the Texas Fine Arts Exhibition, the traveling exhibition that would be touring both around Texas and in Oklahoma. The exhibition's first showing was at the West Texas Chamber of Commerce Building and sponsored by the Abilene Museum of Fine Arts. ¹²⁸

March was a busy month for Darge. At some point apparently, he was invited to participate in the Klepper Art Club which was a group organized by artist Frank Klepper in 1930. The club's twelfth annual exhibit was held at the Joseph Sartor Galleries, beginning on March 9th, where forty-six Texas artists were represented by some seventy-odd objects. Darge showed several of his works. ¹²⁹ This show was noted "as one of the most interesting of the independent, nonprofessional shows." ¹³⁰

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted a two-week, one-man show for forty of Darge's Big Bend and West Texas paintings from March 16 through March 29, 1941. ¹³¹ There were twenty pieces, fourteen were recently finished and new to the exhibition. ¹³² One of the paintings in his one-man show was *Partners*. ¹³³ It is interesting that as much as this piece has been shown and as much as it had been popular with viewers, two years after completion, it was still available. Other paintings in the exhibition were *Rustlers* ¹³⁴ and *Bringing in Fresh Saddle Horses*. ¹³⁵

Reviews of the exhibition indicate that it was well received as illustrations of the current way of life in the West. Viewers and critics seemed to generally respond with positive comments, which must have been welcomed by Darge. Critics did offer a bit of criticism by endorsing Darge's style yet offering that it could also be a bit of an issue by reporting that "Darge's exhibition stands unique in its rigidly honest and deeply sincere representation of the Western scene. He employs no tricks in execution, he never dreams up a rock or a tree, the paint of a hoof or the twist of a rope – and in this is, perhaps, his greatest virtue and chief fault. His insight is keen, his endeavor tireless, and his results often rewardingly vivid and always authentic." ¹³⁶

Art Critic Graydon Heartsill believed that Darge was "one of the best draughtsmen [draftsman] in the local art colony, that his figures are not only true to form but are actually an "alive" part of the picture." ^{137 A} Fellow artist Reveau Bassett stated, "Contemporary trends in painting evidently do not affect Mr. Darge and it is a relief to find one individual who knows what he wants to do and who is steadily improving his technique" ^{137 B} Bassett added, "At present his work seems to me to top most work done of Western life." ^{137 C}

Heartsill continues his very robust article regarding Darge by exploring more personal information about Darge, apparently talking to those who knew him well – the cowhands at

the various ranches where he painted. The general consensus was that Darge was “a rare good fellow – although he is an artist and so must be “a bit loony.””^{137 D} It was said that Darge “can stay up with the best of them through a Fourth of July dance and he isn’t squeamish about bulldogging a steer.”^{137 E} Ranch hands became so accustomed to Darge’s requests for specimens of butterflies, chaparrals, rabbits and snakes^{137 F} that when he asked for a dead cow that he could study, the cowhands never blinked an eye and asked if he also wanted a live one!^{137 G}

As much as Darge had received affirmation for his loyalty to his own style and technique during a time of significant changes among contemporary artists, the modernists and regionalists, there was a noticeable difference in texture created by paints. Over the years, it was noted, he had “given up almost completely the rough thick oils applied with a palette knife in favor of the smoother brushwork. And constantly his painting had grown better.”^{137 H}

Beginning on April 5th, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted the Twelfth Annual Dallas County Allied Arts Exhibition. Darge exhibited several of his recent works, including *Back Home*.¹³⁸

The next exhibitions included two events in June. On June 5th, the Eighth Annual Art Carnival was staged by the Dallas Art Museum League at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. Darge was included as an exhibitor. The carnival had a three-evening run; each artist had an outside booth.¹³⁹

In conjunction with the opening on June 5th of the carnival was the Eighth Annual No-Jury Show at the DMFA. Darge’s painting was among the small group of pieces considered “competent.”¹⁴⁰ Overall, the show was not given high marks, noting that the number of participants had been fewer than the previous years. It was also pointed out that the quality of the pieces was far lower than expected.¹⁴¹

Although there is no date reported for Darge’s departure, in a June 29th mention in the art news, it is stated that he had “packed his paints and brushes and is away for several months of painting in Taos [New Mexico].”¹⁴² It seems Darge didn’t mind the driving – from Dallas to Taos and from Taos to the Big Bend was a lot of driving for 1941!

Fellow artist and art instructor at Sul Ross University in Alpine, Harry Anthony DeYoung joined Darge at the Burnham ranch late in August of 1941.¹⁴³ Reportedly, DeYoung had been traveling to the Big Bend to paint since he relocated to Texas “10 or 12 years”¹⁴⁴ earlier. It is also reported that Darge had been painting for the “last seven summers in and around the Chisos.”¹⁴⁵ Apparently, Darge was captivated by the lifestyle and found satisfaction in recording it in a way that brought enjoyment to others.

Twenty-five Dallas artists’ works were selected for the Third Texas General Exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts which opened in conjunction with the Fifty-Third State Fair of Texas on October 4th.¹⁴⁶ The exhibit was a joint project of the DMFA, the Witte Memorial Museum and the Houston Museum of Fine Arts and was shown in San Antonio and Houston in the month

following the close of the Fair. ¹⁴⁷ Darge's painting, *The Remains of the Old Corral*, was chosen for this exhibition. ¹⁴⁸

An art carnival was sponsored by the Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts at their clubhouse on November 20, 1941. Darge was listed as a contributing artist. ¹⁴⁹ The works of the artists were auctioned. Darge appears to have been very active in supporting local arts groups.

The Dallas Morning News had a monthly supplement that featured the activities in Dallas as well as around the state, and an article in each issue was titled *Spotlight on Interesting Texans*. In the November 1941 issue the Texan featured was "Fred Darge of Dallas and West Texas." ¹⁵⁰ The article was mostly consistent with the available biographical information that has been presented many times previously, some of which has no documents for validation. It was mentioned that Darge "spends his summers on his Chisos Mountain ranch in the colorful Big Bend country of Texas." ¹⁵¹ Indeed, he did spend four to five months each year in the Big Bend, but he was the guest of various ranchers. Contrary to the information presented in this article, Darge spent his time primarily painting and sketching rather than the reported "riding, working and talking." ¹⁵² It also stated that "It is his belief [Darge's] that an artist must know the life he paints from the inside and not be merely an outsider looking on." ¹⁵³

Even though the *Spotlight* article contained some misleading ideas of Darge as a real, working cowboy, some accurate information was presented such as his coming to the U. S., his attendance at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago years as a commercial artist. A number of his paintings were mentioned – "*Partners, Open-air Gospel, Late Afternoon, West Texas Landscape, Blue Creek Headquarters, Old Barn, Goat Herders, Enemies, Horse Wrangler (with its white horse shining against a storm blackened sky), Winter in Chisos, The Remains of the Old Corral and The Round Up.*" ¹⁵⁴ It was stated that "Darge's compositions are drawn with strength and conviction – not lacking in imagination and originality. The colors are recorded as by a keen observer who puts something down exactly as he sees it – which in Darge's art is pretty close to exactly the way it is." ¹⁵⁵

1942

In early February, the Klepper Club judges, Adele Brunet, Reveau Bassett and Frank Klepper, selected fifty-three pieces for the upcoming club's annual show. ¹⁵⁶ Thirty-three pieces were represented among the works chosen for the exhibition which opened on Sunday, February 8th at the Joseph Sartor Galleries. ¹⁵⁷ Two of Darge's oil paintings were listed: *Indian Country* and *Old Betsy*. ¹⁵⁸

The 13th Annual Dallas Allied Arts Exhibition was held March 29th – April 28th at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition of works from 120 artists included *The Ways of Yesterday* submitted by Darge. ¹⁵⁹ Art critic Graydon Heartsill is critical of the exhibitions judges by stating "why did the jury's ax which spared only ninety-two entries and sent almost 300 to the guillotine, become merciful over the grotesque nude which looms up in the excellently painted,

old fashioned kitchen background of Fred Darge's *The Ways of Yesterday?*" Schopenhauer, at his most caustic, dealt more cruelly with the female form than the brush of Mr. Darge. A painter who has deserved the praise he has received for his realistic Western scenes, he should have been discouraged by his show's jury from veering off the anatomy of the less sensitive cow pony. ¹⁶⁰

Darge seems to have enjoyed his participation in the Klepper Club. He was listed as one of the hosts for the April 7th meeting at the DMFA. A tour of the art galleries and a lecture and demonstration by Merritt Mausey on the history of lithography was the program for the evening. ¹⁶¹

In April, under the supervision of the Dallas County Chapter American Red Cross, paintings were collected for the "recreation halls and Recreation Center recreation buildings at Camp Wolters, Mineral Wells." ¹⁶² Darge had contributed his painting, *Bill and Antelope*. ¹⁶³

The annual Art Festival opened on Saturday, April 25th in the Sculpture Garden. Artists had met the previous Thursday evening at Alexandre Hogue's studio at 3312 Reagan to draw for their booths. ¹⁶⁴ Darge was one of twenty-five artists to draw for a booth ¹⁶⁵ and the "atmosphere of West Texas provided the theme for the small oil paints which" he displayed. ¹⁶⁶ Even as the war was being fought in Europe, there was dancing and merriment among the red, white and blue decorated triangular booths showcasing artists at work and at play. ¹⁶⁷ "Exhibiting artists, who had reduced prices on their pictures by at least 20 per cent, had further agreed to accept defense bonds and stamps in partial payments for individual works sold. The defense stamp booth, what with one thing and another, did a land office business." ¹⁶⁸ Additionally, "each artist gave one piece of work to be auctioned for a war relief fund." ¹⁶⁹ These local artists participated with many others across the nation in contributing to the war effort.

Although there does not seem to be any information available regarding works of lithography by Darge, it is reported that he was among the artists who gave "a print" to the Museum League for sale or auction either during the event or thereafter, at the spring Art Carnival. The total collected from these prints was \$40 which was divided between the Army and the Navy relief funds. ¹⁷⁰

The No-Jury Show opened on June 20th at the DMFA and presented the works of fifty-seven artists, including Darge. "The No-Jury Show this year veers sharply from the war flavor which may be expected to filter into everything in the next few months. Whether a majority of the canvases and water colors were completed before Pearl Harbor clamped a tragedian's, ask on the fare of existence or whether the entrants decided that we might as well think about flowers while we can is not known, but generally speaking the No-Jury Show is not an exhibition of a nation at war. It may be the last such for a time – at any rate it is to be seen until June 30th." ¹⁷¹

During research for records and documents for Darge, a Petition for Naturalization, No. 2736 surfaced.¹⁷² Although no date is on the document, it is noted that Darge was 42 years old and still residing at 1836 Park Avenue in Dallas. The Petition was filed under the General Provisions of the Nationality Act of 1940 (Public, No.853, 76th Cong[ress]). When President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the law, Darge and many others who were living in the country but were not citizens were permitted to apply for citizenship in exchange for honorable service in the



Private Fred Darge U.S. Army, 1942, Burnham Family Photo Album

military.¹⁷³ This document must have been completed and filed when Darge joined the Army. He would not become a citizen until after his enlistment was completed and he submitted proof of service and honorable discharge. Darge was cleared by security and inducted into the U. S. Army on November 11, 1942, serial #38285804.¹⁷⁴

The generally accepted date of the beginning of World War II in Europe is September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. The United States directly entered the war when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, an U. S. Naval Base on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. WWII had finally engulfed the entire

world. Around the globe, there were drastic changes that altered life for people everywhere.

The United States needed hundreds of thousands of able-bodied men and women to serve in the military, manufacturing armaments and many other positions to sustain the war effort, both in Europe and Asia. Patriotism in America rose dramatically. Everyone seemed to be contributing in some way to the war effort. Rationing supplies, including tires, gasoline, automobiles and refrigerators, was necessary to ensure materials for producing armaments and all manner of supplies to provide the military with equipment and resources needed to win the war.

At the conclusion of basic training, Darge and many other German-Americans were assigned to the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. At that time, it was the policy of the military to place soldiers of other nationalities as far away as possible from their home country. The Solomon Islands were a sovereign country located in the southwestern Pacific, northeast of Australia. There were six major islands and over 900 smaller islands covering a land area of 11,000 square miles. The Islands were involved in very difficult battles as they were attacked repeatedly by Japan. Additionally, Darge was assigned to Bougainville Island, also known as Bougainville Providence of the North Solomon Islands, independent from the Solomon Islands.

¹⁷⁵

There are no records available regarding his duties and responsibilities, but it would be safe to assume that his skills as a draftsman and a professional artist were used whenever needed. It seems that no matter where Darge went or what he did, his pallet and brushes were always near. As he had done in Texas, he took his oil and watercolors and recorded the current scenes of life in the islands.

1943

There is so record of what Darge had arranged for his paintings while he was away in the Army. There is documentation that several of his works were in exhibitions during those war years so it seems plausible that one of the galleries might have agreed to some arrangement. Darge's painting, *The Bronc Buster*, was shown at the Klepper Art Club's show at the twelfth annual show beginning on Sunday, February 21, 1943. The piece garnered the rating of those that were considered noteworthy. ¹⁷⁶

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts held its fourteen annual Dallas Allied Arts Exhibition, opening on March 28. One hundred fourteen pictures were selected. A special feature was a section that exhibited paintings and art works of men in the service. There were two Darge pieced, an oil titled *Ready to Go* and a pastel, *Little Old Lady*. ¹⁷⁷ Overall, the show was deemed to be up to standard. ¹⁷⁸

In June, the Arcadia Book Store, 1101 Elm Street, featured some special prints among their usual inventory, including two small bird prints from the first Audubon folio. At the very end of the article in the Dallas Morning News, the last paragraph stated, "This shop also handles the work of Fred Darge, Dallas artist, who is now in military service somewhere in the Pacific." ¹⁷⁹

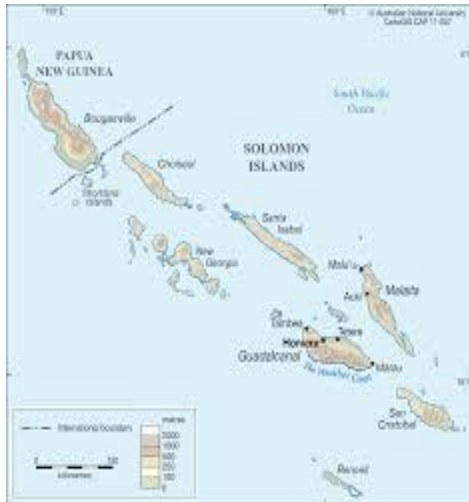
Dr. William E. Howard of Dallas, a collector of early Texas documents, books and paintings, gifted the Daughters of the Republic of Texas with his collection. The sizeable collection of documents and artifacts included "approximately twenty-six paintings depicting historical points of early Texas by Julian Onderdonk and Fred Darge." ¹⁸⁰

1944

The 1944 art season opened with the thirteenth annual Klepper Art Club exhibition on Sunday, January 16, at the Joseph Sartor Galleries. There were fifty paintings and three etchings. Concurrently, the Printmakers Guild opened a show at the DMFA. A critical review of both shows brought comments that noted the print show was all feminine and that the Klepper was "predominantly so." In comparing the two exhibits, it was stated that Klepper artists "paint inwardly rather than outwardly and presently rather than forward." ¹⁸¹ Darge's work received more than a passing critique – "Fred Darge's canvases, in spite of the poor figure drawing and synthetic backgrounds, have conviction and a spirit of the Texas cattleman about them." ¹⁸² Nothing has been found that illustrates the way Darge might have responded to criticism. Since

sketches from his sixteen months of active duty. The Klepper Art Club met on Wednesday, May 3rd, 7:30 pm at the home of Ethel Pearl Mitchell, 3300 Drexel. ¹⁸⁷

On Saturday, June 3, 1944, Friedrich Ernst Darge became a naturalized American citizen and thereafter would be legally known as Fred Ernest Darge. ¹⁸⁸ He was among seventy new Americans, eleven of those in the uniform of the United States Army. Upon his honorable discharge from the Army and the presentation of related paperwork, his Petition for Naturalization filed in 1942 was approved.



Map of Solomon Islands

Judge William H. Atwell presided over the ceremony, saying that “We can’t view freedom as being free, but as something for which each generation must pay. The cost is sacrifice and vigilance, and each generation is the debtor of the preceding generation.” ¹⁹⁰ Unfortunately, as is the case with Darge, there is no record of any kind that would give any indication as to his thoughts about this event. Apparently, he wanted to become a citizen, and felt strongly about it enough to go into battle for his new country even before he was a citizen. At this point, he was 44 years old and had seen two world wars in his lifetime.

Fred Darge: Paintings of Bougainville was an exhibition that was at the DMFA from July 2 – August 1, 1944. ¹⁹¹ The exhibition list of thirty-four paintings with titles, media, locations and prices was recovered from the DMFA files. ¹⁹² “Some of the sketches were done on the spot and the paintings were done from sketches and memory.” ¹⁹³ The documentation is considered a rarity because some helpful information was provided. Darge also had painted on the islands of Guadalcanal, Russel Island and New Georgia Island, ¹⁹⁴ all in the Solomon chain. Although there are no records of sales, there were paintings from the Solomon Islands in his possession at his demise.

Closing out 1944, Darge had two events. The last exhibition of the year was the 6th Texas General Exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts that was held from October 1st to the 23rd during the Texas State Fair. ¹⁹⁵ And, he showed his paintings from the “Pacific war front” at the November 8th meeting of the Klepper Art Club at the studio of Adele Brunet, 3017 Fitzhugh. ¹⁹⁶

1945

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted the sixteenth Allied Arts Exhibition from March 25th – April 22nd. ¹⁹⁷ Even though at least one critic noted that the jury had done an excellent job of “selecting as balanced and interesting an exhibition as possible....” ¹⁹⁸ the conclusion was that the overall show was “not a very high peak.” ¹⁹⁹ Further commenting, the critic stated, “The artists of Dallas County are a skilled and faithful lot, but this year their hearts were not in it.

The low quality of the show is not a question, in most instances, of bad painting or careless printmaking. It is a matter of spirit and brio, of having something urgent to say in terms of a square of canvas and some pigment.”²⁰⁰ Darge’s painting, *Going Home*, received a critical nod of approval and was one that was commended for being “bright, cleverly designed and sincere.”²⁰¹

In July, the museum presented an exhibition of the prize-winning pieces from the Allied show that were now included in the museum’s permanent collection.²⁰² Darge’s painting, *Survival of the Fittest*, was an “anonymous donation” to the museum’s collection.²⁰³ This is believed to be the first donation of a Darge painting that had been donated to the museum.

On July 5th, the Telenews Theater held an event for the Art in Action War Bond premiere. “In connection with this the MGM movie, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, will have its first local showing at 8:30 p.m.”²⁰⁴ Those attending this event could “have their portraits sketched for a bond and see demonstrations by regional artists.”²⁰⁵ A painting contributed by Darge was included with the works of art to be “auctioned from the stage for bonds.”²⁰⁶ And were included in the group of art work that would “mark the beginning of a permanent art bar.”²⁰⁷

A few days later in July, the Texas Artists Group exhibition opened at the Telenews Theater with a showing of regional paintings. *A Summer Day*, an oil by Darge, is a slight departure from his usual canvasses.²⁰⁸

In September, the Bill Cole Gallery had a showing that included Darge.²⁰⁹

World War II in both Europe and in the Pacific ended in September. There is no date known for Darge’s departure from employment at North American Aviation and his return to being a professional artist. Most assuredly, he was anxious to return to his art, the traveling and to the world that he had known before the war. The West called and he was more than ready to answer the call of the outdoors and the vast open spaces that were waiting to be transferred to canvas. The war that had drastically changed the world had not changed Darge’s aspirations at all.

At the October meeting of the Klepper Arts Club, Darge presented a program, the ABC’s of Landscape Painting. The Club met in the home of Miss Ethel P. Mitchell, 3300 Drexel Drive.²¹⁰

Dr. William E. Howard, who had donated his extensive Texas collection to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas in 1943, was honored on October 12th at the opening of the DRT Library in Alamo Hall.^{211 A} The collections consisted of documents, books, manuscripts and art work that included eight paintings by Julian Onderdonk and an equal number by Fred Darge.^{211 B}

The Christmas Gift Sale Exhibition of paintings opened at the DMFA on Sunday, December 9, 1945. The sale included sixty paints submitted by thirty-two local artists and prices ranged from \$5 to \$200.²¹² The works submitted included a wide variety of scenes and “[w]ith landscapes, still lifes, portraits, etc., the exhibit has potential solutions to problems of beginning art

collectors, Christmas shoppers, and local artists in search of a market, as well as items for the connoisseurs.”²¹³ Darge’s painting, *In the Chisos Mountains*, was noted for its “intimate knowledge of that region.”²¹⁴

Darge was included in the third annual Art Exhibit and Sale sponsored by the Caller-Times in Corpus Christi, Texas in December.²¹⁵ It was mentioned that the “appreciation and possession of good art is not beyond the reach of average citizens...”²¹⁶ Darge was represented by his oil, *Talking Things Over*, priced at \$75.²¹⁷

A classified ad in the Dallas Morning News stated, “IDEAL gift for Christmas, local and western paintings by Fred Darge. 614 N. Ewing” Darge appears to have been busy and had produced pieces for the exhibits during the year as well as some to sell from his studio.²¹⁸

There are no records that reveal where Darge traveled after his discharge from the Army in March, 1944 or for the year of 1945 when the war ended in September and presumably his employment at North American Aviation. It is conceivable that he spent this time at home, working in his studio, in order to re-establish himself, painting from sketches he had done while in the military and completing pieces that had been started during those months of service.

1946

The first exhibition of the year for which documentation was found was for an exhibit that the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts assembled under the sponsorship of the Tyler Art Club and the Tyler branch of the American Association of University Women. It was to be shown in Tyler, Texas April 6th – 12th. The list of Texas artists represented in the permanent collection of the DMFA was the nucleus of the show and included Darge.²¹⁹

During the pre-war years after Darge relocated from Chicago to Texas, he had spent the late spring into the fall in the Big Bend. The assumption has been that he started this travel schedule in the middle 30’s although no exact year has been determined. Darge had developed very amicable and strong personal relationships with the Burnhams, the Buttrills, the Nails and the Wilsons. He had become acquainted with other ranchers and painted at their ranches. Darge’s knowledge of the rugged and challenging land had grown with his devote dedication to its people and places.

There had been major changes in the Big Bend during the war years. The idea of developing the land of the Chisos Mountain region into a park had been alive and moving slowly forward since the middle 1930’s so it is likely that Darge had heard about and was aware of the development which had displaced his friends. He had corresponded some with the Burnhams during his overseas duty, but there is no record of what he knew regarding the changes that were taking place. Undoubtedly, the discovery of all those changes must have been a real shock. The ranching families that had graciously extended hospitality during his seasonal visits were all gone. Gone were the cows, horses, goats and sheep; the houses and bunkhouses he



1/2-Ton, 4 x 4, Field Ambulance, Built by Dodge Brothers Corp, Division of Chrysler Corporation

had stayed in, the corrals and corral buildings, the miles and miles of barbed wire and new wire fences. With the exception of a few ranch buildings which were used by the park's staff, the land was being returned to the native desert environment prior to the sale of land and the settlement that came with human occupation. Eventually, even those last structures were removed. It is entirely plausible that Darge lamented the loss of all that had been available to him, both by man and by nature.

At some point, likely within the first four months of 1946, Darge purchased a WWII surplus military ambulance. It was a clever idea, probably born of his thriftiness and ability to maximize available resources. Knowing that he wanted to return to the Big Bend area as well as to venture further westward, Darge realized he would need reliable transportation in a sturdy vehicle. He also knew that he would need some kind of shelter with accommodations for sleeping, meal preparation and storage for all manner of needed supplies. The ambulance was converted to a rolling studio and camper. This vehicle served him well as he traveled thousands of miles during his summer excursions over the next five or six years. He used it to travel to New Mexico in the summer of 1946. ²²⁰

In December, the DMFA tried "to make things a little easier for that weary white-bearded gentleman in the red suit who, strikes or no strikes, is due to come down off the North Pole sometime in the month." ²²¹ The annual Christmas Sale Exhibition was held December 1st – 24th. The only requests made to the artists are that "pictures be priced within reasonable Christmas pocketbook range.....is \$15 to \$125." ²²² Darge is among those that were familiar to those interested in art.

Also, in December, Darge again participated in the Caller-Times Art Exhibit and Sale in Corpus Christi, Texas. A Mrs. Eunice Perry purchased three paintings, including Darge's *Four Riders*. ²²³ Fifteen oil and water color paintings and fourteen prints were sold during the exhibit and sale. Private purchases were \$1,163 and purchase awards by the Corpus Christi Art Foundation were \$1,050 with exhibit sales totaling \$2,213. ²²⁴

1947

Darge's first showing in 1947 was a one-man exhibit at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. ²²⁵ Again, opinions were both complimentary and critical. It was noted that while "[s]unshine, fresh air and the open spaces of the desert country fill the pictures of Fred Darge's" ²²⁶ canvases, the figures of both man and horses tend to be stiff and unintentional. Darge is both commended for his love and devotion to "the West, the rocks, mountains, horses, Indians and

cowboys in it and they are about all he likes to paint.” ²²⁷ In spite of some technical criticism of his works, “there shines through all of them an at-homeness, a feeling and understanding and love of place that becomes the most important thing about them. They are a sincere expression of a good feeling and the simplicity of them, the bright colors, the forthright lights and darks of New Mexico country, the everyday occupations of the people in them, pass the feeling along.” ²²⁸

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts continued the presentation of one-man shows for those artists who participated in the annual Allied Arts exhibit. Darge’s exhibit was held from February 23 through March 16. ²²⁹ *Summer Harvest*, one of his Taos, New Mexico scenes was featured in the showing. ²³⁰ The show was later extended through March 25th. ²³¹

In March, the Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts accepted thirty paintings and five prints for their exhibition to be held at the E. P. Turner Clubhouse, 324 South Marsalis from Sunday, March 21st through March 30th. Darge was one of the selected artists chosen by the jury. ²³²

The eighteenth annual Allied Arts Exhibition opened at the Dallas Museum on April 6, 1947. There were 144 paintings and works of other media presented with fifty-three entries selected for the exhibition. Darge’s oil, *Shearing Time*, received an honorable mention. ²³³

The Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts displayed an exhibit of fifty-seven works of art at the E. P. Turner Clubhouse in November. Darge’s paintings received recognition as “noteworthy paintings.” ²³⁴ His piece, *Summer Harvest*, tied for third place in the popular vote. ²³⁵



Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, Texas

Nineteen Dallas artists participated in the fifth annual exhibit Corpus Christi Caller-Times exhibition in Corpus Christi, Texas during the month of December. As in the past few years, Darge again entered works to be shown. ²³⁶

1948

Darge’s art was steadily becoming more well-known around the state. In February the Laguna Gloria Art Museum in Austin hosted a one-man exhibition of his paintings. ²³⁷

The 1948 Klepper Club annual exhibition displayed forty-five works in oil, pastel and water color and three pieces of ceramics submitted by thirty-eight members of the Club. The exhibition opened on Sunday, February 15th at the Joseph Sartor Galleries. Darge was included in that show. ²³⁸

The nineteenth annual Allied Arts Exhibition opened on May 2nd. There were 415 entries, two of which belonged to Darge.²³⁹ “Three well-known artists, Wayman Adams, Everett Spruce and Alexandre Hogue, comprised the 3-man jury which focused a long-patient and critical eye Thursday on the largest group of entries ever to be submitted for an Allied Arts Exhibit.”²⁴⁰

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts assembled two circuit shows that would travel during the fall. Twenty-four paintings from the museum’s permanent collection entitled *Contemporary Texas Paintings* opened the exhibit at the Texas Fine Arts Association in Austin where it will be shown from October 10th through the 24th. The exhibit itinerary in Texas includes Corpus Christi, Abilene, Lubbock, Denison and Galveston and Durant, Oklahoma.²⁴¹ Darge’s painting, *Survival of the Fittest*, was one of the selected works in the show.²⁴²

The annual exhibition of the Frank Reaugh Art Club opened Sunday, November 7, 1948 at the Joseph Sartor Galleries and was be available through November 17th. The Club’s first show at the gallery was in 1923. A jury comprised of Ramon Froman, Fred Darge and Mrs. Vivian Aunspaugh met at the gallery the previous Wednesday to select entries.²⁴³

A three-man jury selected ninety paintings from artists across the country to be shown at the annual Caller-Times Corpus Christi Art Exhibit. It was noted that [w]hile there are few, if any, pieces in the show which will prove to be of lasting greatness, there is much excellent craftsmanship, knowledge of composition, color and other aesthetic principles. The works show time, care and thought was spent on them. Inspired by different motives, they present emotional reactions, intellectual ideas, humor, or only what is actually seen.....the majority are more suitable for the home than for a museum collection.”²⁴⁴ Artists were requested to send this kind of works and the jury was charged with keeping this in mind as they judged.²⁴⁵

1949

Fifty-three paintings and two ceramic pieces were displayed at the annual Klepper Art Club in March at the Joseph Sartor Galleries. The show, it was noted by critics would give the viewer a glimpse of the work produced by a majority of Dallas’ art community. Works ranging from “pleasant amateur quality to that of commendable professional ability”²⁴⁶ could be enjoyed by gallery patrons. Darge participated in this exhibit.²⁴⁷

In late April, the three judges for selecting the art to be included in the twentieth annual Allied Arts exhibition spent a day at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts scrutinize[ing] 479 pieces before determining that 137 works, including a Darge painting. The exhibition opened on May 1st.²⁴⁸

The circuit show assembled by the DMFA in 1948 was extended to include Kingsville, Texas. The exhibition was comprised of pieces from the museum’s permanent collections of Texas artists. At the end of May, the exhibition returned to Dallas and could be seen at the DMFA beginning on June 5th.²⁴⁹

Darge, along with his son, Dave, is reported to be doing “sketches to take back to Dallas in order to paint larger canvasses of beautiful scenes which he is finding in the Palo Duro [State Park] during August.”²⁵⁰ Dave, who was an art student in California, had “expressed amazement at the beauties of the Palo Duro.”²⁵¹ The park hosted an exhibit at the Lodge on Sunday, August 14th.



Capitol Dome, Palo Duro Canyon State Park, Canyon, Texas

Sometimes painting on location, in the wilderness brought unexpected incidents. One of the few records of Darge’s personal experiences as an artist was reported in a Canyon News article dated August 18, 1949. He told of a few incidents, including one that happened during his excursion in the Palo Duro – near the Capitol Dome, he was working on sketching when a “sudden gust of wind swept down the canyon, upsetting his easel and spreading brushes and paints in all directions.”

²⁵² Apparently while painting in the Big Bend he had realized that he needed to “fasten down canvases, brushes and paints because so many little wind whirls which were menace to artists.” ²⁵³ Not only the winds, but animals were the culprits of frustrations. When “a big fat inquisitive hog upset” Darge’s easel and scattered his material “to the four winds” he must have felt very frustrated. ²⁵⁴

1950

As is the usual schedule in Dallas for exhibitions, the Klepper Art Club opened their annual show on February 5, 1950 at the Joseph Sartor Galleries, 4512 McKinney. Forty-three canvases were selected by artists who submitted works in oil, watercolor, pastel and casein. Photographs and book illustrations were also included. Darge was represented by an oil painting. ²⁵⁵

The annual exhibition of the Oak Cliff Society of fine Arts was held during March at the E. P. Turner Clubhouse, 324 South Marsalis. Darge participated in the exhibition. ²⁵⁶

“Thursday was a hectic day and a longer one than usual at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. A jury composed of E. M. Schiwetz of Houston, Charles Umlauf of Austin and Jerry Harwell of Fort worth worked overtime to winnow out 191 works by 163 entrants omitting photography sections from a mass of 462 entries submitted by 214 artists for the Dallas Painting, Sculpture and Photography show opening April 30.” ²⁵⁷ Darge had entered two oil paintings, *The Remuda*, which had won the \$50 Sanger Harris award ²⁵⁸ and *The Pack Train*. ²⁵⁹

The Dallas Painting, Sculpture and Photography show was on display at the DMFA from April 30 – May 28, 1950. A critic's review of the show discussed thoughts that while the exhibit was a good one, there was likely no comprised opinion of the debate between who the winners and non-winners were or between who deserved winning and who did not deserve to win. There were almost 500 items selected under the new name for the show, a name that replaced the Allied shows of the past. Darge was mentioned as a "pillar"²⁶⁰ of the artists showing. As one of the "stalwarts and dependables" who deserved "a pat on the back,"²⁶¹ Darge was recognized for the "precision artistry [that] is still unmatched of its type."²⁶²

In a perusal of all the available and numerous articles gathered regarding exhibitions in which Darge participated, it was noticed that the modernists had garnered almost all prizes and awards. Furthermore, most of the recognition during the 40's had gone to those associated professionally with the DMFA. Numerous times over the years, Darge's works had been mentioned as commendable and competent and were generally favorable. His thoughts about



Survival of the Fittest, 24 x 32, Oil on Canvas, Circa 1941, Dallas Museum of Art

this topic have been lost with his demise and those that knew him. In all probability he must have felt at least somewhat overlooked and unappreciated. His work apparently was recognized positively by his peers and the public; he appears to have been widely accepted in activities sponsored by the DMFA. Whatever his feelings, he seems to have steadily forged ahead, doing what he loved the way he wanted to do it.

The summer 1950 exhibit at the DMFA was curated from the permanent collections. It was noted that the effects of the summer heat would be defeated by the new air-conditioner that would be cooling the

museum.²⁶³ As to the collection of paintings that were now in the permanent collection, it was noted that "One of the museum's most important assets.....is the excellent and widely representative collection of contemporary Texas painters." And that "the Dallas museum is acquiring for itself and the community a nest egg of American canvases that portends a rich future."²⁶⁴ Darge's painting, *Survival of the Fittest*, was recognized for "especially startling realism."²⁶⁵

Darge's painting, *The Stampede*, received accolades for being "among the few reliable artists.....[Darge] displays another of his successful western formulas..."²⁶⁶ in the No-Jury Show at the DMFA during June. The overall exhibition was soundly criticized as illustrating "the fact is inescapably plain that local art has not advanced itself one whit by this display."²⁶⁷ It would be interesting to know if the public agreed with the critic's rather harsh statement. One would assume the artists would submit their best work for a show at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.

According to a newspaper article, Darge spent the summer of 1950 painting in the Palo Duro Canyon. ²⁶⁸ He must have been captivated by the canyon's landscapes and colors. It was noted that visitors in the Canyon had "noted his old Army ambulance on the canyon's rim, as isolated as a shepherd's wagon. Darge slept on a cot in the ambulance and, by day, set his easel in its shade." ²⁶⁹ in his listing of exhibitions and a few activities, he recorded that he had spent "July to Sept[ember] 2, 1950, Canyon, Texas." ²⁷⁰

1951

The Museum League of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts welcomed the new year of 1951 by announcing a new rental program. Under the guidelines of the program, artists submitted works for rental to museum patrons and others who liked and enjoyed art. There was no commission withheld from the sale price which artists established. Rental fees were established and were two percent of the sale price for a three-month rental plus a \$5 handling fee. Rental fees went to the museum to defray expenses for handling and transferring of works. Darge was among the Dallas artists to submit paintings. ²⁷¹

Also, in January, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted the Fourth Annual Exhibition of Prints and Drawings. From January 21st through February 18th, Darge's work was included in the show. ²⁷²

Joseph Sartor Galleries hosted the annual Klepper Art Club exposition which opened on Sunday, April 2nd. There were forty-five works submitted by thirty-five artists including Darge. ²⁷³

There were thirty-six booths claimed for the fourth annual Art Carnival to be held outside, between the DMFA and the Lagoon, from June 9th-10th. There were paintings, drawings, crafts or services for on-the-spot sketches, etc., in booths for sale. Darge was the first to reserve a space. ²⁷⁴

At the end of June, on the 28th, the Lone Star Gas Company announced their new service campaign. They would be giving paintings instead of plaques to their six winning offices. Seven pictures by various artists, including *In the Canyon* by Darge, were selected. ²⁷⁵ The seven paintings would travel between offices in the general district, including the Fort Worth Division. San Angelo was the first city to exhibit the art. ²⁷⁶ The male viewers in Ballinger preferred Darge's painting over the others. ²⁷⁷ In Eastland, the painting was one of the three favorites of those who viewed the exhibit. ²⁷⁸ Overall, the exhibit was well received and well attended by each community on the tour.

It is interesting, but not unexpected, that with post-WWII prosperity and interest in art from businesses, corporations and utilities had risen. These new art patrons realized that art was a successful way to attract customers. ²⁷⁹ Encouraging artists and art appreciation was a win-win

for buyers as well as for artists. The Long Star purchase of seven paintings by seven different artists totaled \$3,000.²⁸⁰ The exhibit traveled to forty-eight towns. Once the paintings were sent to the winning offices, the pieces would become part of permanent galleries and would be seen every day by people working, doing business or visiting the offices. School busses brought students to see the exhibition.²⁸¹ Art that portrayed Texas, or visions of Texas, was seen by those who quite possibly would have never visited the museums of major cities.

The first two weeks of October, Darge had an exhibit of sixteen oils at the Rush Company. "Most of them were painted in and around the Palo Duro Canyon, the Big Bend Country, and New Mexico. They are *Palo Duro Canyon, Going Home, Approaching Storm, Resting, Water Hole, Indians, Driving Strays, A Bad One, A Friendly Encounter, Sunrise, The Navajo, In the Shade of the Cottonwood, Pegro, Harvest Time, Black Mesa and Making Camp.*"²⁸²

1952

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts kicked-off the new year with the opening of the Second Annual Texas Rental Art Show on Sunday, January 27, 1952. Thirty-four artists from nine Texas cities contributed works with more invited and expected to subscribe. Art for all types of homes had been submitted. Darge was one of the fourteen Dallas artists to subscribe to the program.²⁸³

"The Long Star Gar Company's traveling exhibit, which was viewed by 10,000 visitors during its tour of 48 district offices in Texas within the last six months, will close with a series of presentation ceremonies over the company's system in February."²⁸⁴ Darge's painting, *In the Canyon*, was among the favorites selected by exhibit visitors. This painting was also the one that was awarded to the Waxahachie district manager, M. M. Williams, on Friday, February 1st at an evening dinner meeting of all the district's employees.²⁸⁵

At some point during 1952, Darge ventured northwest from his studio in Dallas to sketch and paint in the Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge in south central Oklahoma.²⁸⁶ Darge continuously painted wildlife and the refuge being a national park had its share of the wildlife he liked paint which included deer, elk, bison and the longhorn cattle from the offspring of the original starting herd of August of 1927. [Please refer to Chapter 23, titled Texas Longhorns for more comprehensive information.](#)

Darge was represented by Rush Company with a "solo show"²⁸⁷ in late November and into December. The exhibit included new works from the summer sketching trip to ranches near Sweetwater, Texas – *Working Cattle, Tom, and Night Scene.*²⁸⁸ In all probability Darge had painted at the White Hat ranch and Bandy ranch owned by Jack and Myrhl Frost of Dallas. The rest of the exhibit was paintings completed over the last six years. "Although his style is usually acutely realistic, Darge has included in the current show a cubistic paraphrase of another large painting of a man tending goats on a sun swept plain."²⁸⁹

1953

At the beginning of 1953, Darge's solo show at Rush Company continued.²⁹⁰ The relationship between this gallery and Darge began in 1951. There is no information regarding this arrangement. At least from the time that Darge relocated to Dallas from San Antonio, he had been primarily represented by the Lawrence Galleries. Darge and the Lawrence's appear to have established a close relationship. It has been assumed that the Lawrence's had an arrangement with Darge to exhibit and sell his work and to submit paintings to special exhibits while Darge was overseas serving in the military from November 1942 to March 1944.

Joseph Lawrence died in 1943²⁹¹ and his son, Harry, inherited the gallery. Harry had actively promoted Darge from the beginning of the art galleries relationship. Although no evidence of continued one-man shows at the Lawrence Galleries has surfaced, it is believed that Harry Lawrence had continued his promotion of Darge during the war years and the next few years until 1948 when Lawrence sold the gallery. No record could be located regarding the new owners. There is also no information about the new owners or the discontinuance of Darge's representation with this gallery. [Please refer to Chapter 2, titled Art Dealers, Art Galleries and Museums for more comprehensive information.](#)

The Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts hosted an exhibition of paintings and prints at their clubhouse from Friday, February 15th through March 19th. Darge had served with Reveau Bassett and Bud Biggs as jurors for the show.²⁹³

The 24th Annual Exhibition of Dallas County Painting, Drawing and Sculpture was featured at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts from May 6th – May 31st. Darge's painting, *The Monster*, was included in the show.²⁹³ The exhibit was given a favorable review although several of the usual artists were missed by critics.²⁹⁴

From Tuesday, December 1st through January 1st, the Rush Company displayed twenty Darge paintings. "Several of the oils are results of a sketching trip to the Wichita Mountains last [1952] summer."²⁹⁵ [Please refer to Chapter 23, titled Texas Longhorns for more comprehensive information.](#)

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts exhibition of twenty of Darge's oils completed the year of exhibits in December.²⁹⁶ *Three Longhorns* was representative of the scenes that he loved most to paint – man, horse and cow. "Darge's oils are as clear in method and intent as the western atmosphere in which he sketches. The artist makes his observations in West Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico, returning to Dallas to sort them out in naturalistic terms. There is a certain naïve quality about his drawing of animals, with their almost human faces, and a storybook ruggedness in his cowhands that suggest the untutored hand. Darge's training, however, is evident in the technically smooth skies and hazy mountain sketches."²⁹⁷

1954

Darge participated in the annual Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts exhibition held at the E. P. Turner Clubhouse. During the last week of February until March 15, art patrons could view the works of forty artists.²⁹⁸

In June, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts hosted the twenty-fifth Exhibition of Dallas County Painting, Drawing and Sculpture exhibition. From the 5th through the 30th, museum visitors and patrons viewed the works of local artists, including Darge.²⁹⁹

The Merchants State Bank's exhibit, *Art to Live With*, was a collection of paintings of local artist's works that was shown in October and November.³⁰⁰ It was noted that these artists, Reveau Bassett, Bud Biggs, Fred Darge, Victor Lallier, Ella McWhinney and Frederic Mizen are prodigious and sincere workers along conservative lines, whose style complement each other and create a popular front for enjoyment by many."³⁰¹

During December, the Rush Company hosted an exhibit of twenty Darge works. "Subjects include[d] livestock, cowhands, wild life and just plain scenery, in which Darge always manages to convey the spaciousness and clear atmosphere of the west to a surprising degree. Drawing and modeling take an occasional primitive turn, and color remains consistently personal in each painting. Photographic realism seems to be the aim."³⁰² It is plausible that "modeling" in this quote could refer to the occasional display of one or more of Darge's animal wood carvings that were the result of his wildlife painting excursion.

1955

The year of 1955 began with the annual Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts annual exhibition. The exhibition included Darge among the thirty-three artists selected for the display.³⁰³

In March, the annual exhibition of the Klepper Art Club was hosted by the Joseph Sartor Galleries on Sunday, March 5th. There were fifty pieces by forty-one artists, including oils, pastels and watercolors. Reveau Bassett, Charles T. Browning, Fred Darge, Ramon Froman and E. G. Eisenlohr were among the forty-one exhibitors.³⁰⁴

Critics did not refrain from expressing their lack of enthusiasm for the twenty-sixth annual Exhibition of Paintings, Drawing and Sculpture show at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.³⁰⁵ The Dallas show was deemed as not showing local artists in a favorable light in comparison to the local Fort Worth show the previous month of artists to the west. While critics offered that Fort Worth's offerings were more professional, their lows were likewise however, the exhibit did have "some pleasures and interests in the sprawling, uneven mass."³⁰⁶ Furthermore, "[a] few old faithful's give predictable performances, but some expected names are missing."³⁰⁷ Darge was represented in this show, as usual, and was one of a dwindling number of exhibitions in which he participated over the recent years.

Twenty-one artists from Dallas had their submissions of works selected for the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts seventeenth annual Texas Paintings and Sculpture Show at the State Fair of Texas. A single juror, Lloyd Goodrich, had the sole responsibility of choosing 82 artists and their 84 pieces for the show from the 474 pieces by 296 Texas artists submitted. Dallas led the group with twenty-one artists, followed by San Antonio with 13, Fort Worth, 10 and Houston 5. Darge was one of the Dallas twenty-one that gained acceptance.³⁰⁸ “The exhibition [was] expected to break attendance records in Dallas and move to Fort Worth in November to be seen at the Fort Worth Art Center.”³⁰⁹

Billed as the “first one-man show by Fred Darge in nearly a year” the Rush Company announced the exhibition for the month of December. The show included “Western subjects from the artist’s trips to New Mexico, Oklahoma and the Big Bend area, include[d] 27 oils and 10 wood carvings.”³¹⁰ The photographs accompanying a newspaper article for the exhibit featured a 12” x 16” oil, *Pecos Cowboy*, and a woodcarving of a bull entitled *Brahman*.³¹¹

1956

The Klepper Art Club annual art exhibit hosted by the Joseph Sartor Galleries opened on Sunday, March 25th and remained on view until April 4th.³¹² Ramon Froman, Kathrine Travis and Reveau Bassett served as jurors for the exhibit of twenty-nine accepted entries offered by thirty-one artists, including Darge.³¹³

The Highland Park Shopping Village sponsored the second annual La Fiesta of Art on October 3th and 4th and again on October 11th and 12th. The “inner core of the [shopping village] was strung [with] 238 numbered display booths for local artists and craftsmen, including the recently represented Irving Art Association.”³¹⁴ The opening night crowd likely numbered around 300 which appeared to have been acceptable attendance. It was noted that purchases were being made, some directly from the artists who were either seated or standing before the allotted spaces. Darge was listed as among the “highly skilled regulars” participating in the event.³¹⁵

Again, in December, the Rush Company hosted a one-man show for the month. “The twenty-two canvases by Fred Darge, on view through Dec[ember] 31st at the Rush Company reiterate the artist’s abiding devotion to Southwestern range life. Whereas Otis Dozier, for example, has progressed from the particulars of the same general outdoors to its universals, Mr. Darge rests content with pictorial detailing.”³¹⁶ A result of this self-satisfaction was that his works, as usual, were “competent samples of the illustrator’s art. Depth perception is generally reliable and there is a strong eye for the realities as this painter sees them.”³¹⁷ The critic’s choice to illustrate the point is *Chachalaca*, an oil of a game bird found in the lower Rio Grande Valley and in Mexico. The other canvases’ themes were the Sierra Blanca country, the Big Bend domain and the Wichita Mountains area in Oklahoma.³¹⁸

1957



Sabine Street, Size Unavailable, Oil on Canvas Board, Collection of Ellis Turner

Darge did not change residences often. He had been at the 614 ½ North Ewing address since at least 1945, but his address changed to 2730 ½ East Kiest Street, Dallas in 1957 and remained such until at least 1964. ³¹⁹

"Sabine Street" is written by Darge on the back of the canvas board. It has been assumed that the building in the foreground was his boarding house. Validating the claim was not possible but Sabine did intersect with North Ewing and there appears to be a cross street in front of the structure which could have been North Ewing.

Once again, the Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts organized and exhibited their annual show in February. The 1957 showing had forty-nine artists, including Darge. ³²⁰ The works were on display from February 20th through March 17th.

Darge was represented in the twenty-eighth Annual Exhibition of Dallas County Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture that could be seen at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts between April 10th and May 12th. ³²¹

On Sunday, May 12th, the Klepper Art Club returned to Joseph Sartor Galleries for their annual exhibit which would be on display through May 21st. ³²² The exhibition continued to show student as well as Club members' art, including Darge.

The Rilla Art Club met on Thursday, May 16th. Darge was the guest speaker. ³²³

The Shuttles Galleries hosted a preview of a touring exhibit of the Artists and Craftsmen Associated on Sunday, September 22nd. Darge was among the five judges who culled the 74 entries down to thirty-seven accepted works of oil, watercolor, china painting and sculpture. When the exhibit closed at the Shuttles, it would tour fifteen cities in Texas and New Mexico until May 12, 1958. No list of participating artists could be located, but it is likely safe to assume that Darge had at least one if not two pieces accepted. ³²⁴

Another new gallery that became affiliated with Darge was the Downtown Galleries. This gallery exhibited seventeen of his oils from October 5th through October 19th. ³²⁵

Darge's paintings were shown for the first time at the Shuttles Galleries of Dallas beginning on Saturday, October 19th for two weeks. ³²⁶

1958

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts curated the 30th Annual Exhibition of Dallas County Paintings, Drawing and Sculpture between April 12th and May 18th, 1958. The exhibit included Darge's work. ³²⁷

On Friday, May 9th, Darge was joined by "Jessie Davis and Viola Gray Carpenter to select thirty-one oils, watercolors and one sculpture and one woodcarving each for the annual Klepper Art club exhibition " ³²⁸ As usual, Joseph Sartor Galleries hosted the event which was on display beginning on Sunday, May 11th and continuing through the following Sunday. ³²⁹ Thirty-one artists were represented in the show, ³³⁰ most likely including Darge. At this point in time, Darge had been a long-time member, and as usual, it is assumed that he submitted a piece or two for display.

The 1958 La Fiesta of Art was held again at the Highland Park Shopping Village from October 1st to the 3rd. ³³¹ Several weeks before the event, one hundred booths had been reserved ³³² and by the opening, there were around two hundred booths displaying arts and crafts from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. each day. ³³³ Darge, Ramon Froman and Bud Briggs were the "trio of artists who will demonstrate on the hour each night in the theater court." ³³⁴

Darge presented a program to the Frank Reaugh Art Club on Wednesday, November 19th at the El Sibil Studio, Crawford and Fifth. He related experiences from his painting excursions and showed sketches he had done during his travels. ³³⁵

1959

The Klepper Art Club's twenty-ninth annual exhibition was held for the first time at the Shuttle Galleries. The exhibit opened on Sunday, March 1, 1959 with pieces submitted by thirty-seven artists, including Darge. It was noted that more than half of these artists also are showing with the Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts. ³³⁶

Darge was accepted as one of seventy-nine artists out of 293 entries to show his work in the 30th Annual Exhibition of Dallas County Painting, Drawings and Sculpture. ³³⁷ The exhibition was held at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, April 12th to May 18th. ³³⁸

During the second week of September, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts announced that its new Dallas Love Field Terminal exhibit, which is comprised of work by Texas artists from their permanent collection, will include pieces in oil or tempera by eleven artists, including Darge. ³³⁹

1960

Art exhibitions for the year started with a Dallas Museum of Fine Arts showing at the opening of the new Rosenberg Library in Galveston, Texas. The eighteen day show featured works from the permanent collection, including Darge's *Survival of the Fittest*.³⁴⁰

Darge was one of three judges for the annual invitational exhibition sponsored and hosted by the Oak Cliff Fine Arts Society.³⁴¹ The exhibition was viewed at the clubhouse, 410 North Rosemont,³⁴² from February 21st through March 21st.³⁴³ Darge was an honoree artist and several of his paintings were included in the showing.³⁴⁴

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts exhibit, "Nineteen from Texas" was hosted by Howard Junior College in Big Spring, Texas during March.³⁴⁵ The exhibit from the permanent collection of the museum included Darge's oil, *Survival of the Fittest*.³⁴⁶

Joseph Sartor Galleries displayed the annual membership exhibition at the Frank Reaugh Art Club reception tea on Sunday, May 15th.³⁴⁷ Jurors, including Darge, selected works for the exhibit.³⁴⁸

Fifty-eight paintings, twenty drawings and 10 pieces of sculpture were shown at the 31st Annual Exhibition of Dallas County Painting, Drawing and Sculpture. Fifty-eight artists were represented, including a drawing by Darge. The annual competitive show opened at the Dallas Museum of Fines Arts on May 22nd.³⁴⁹

Apparently, gathering from a review of available newspaper critics' columns and general interest articles, citizen interest in art was growing during the early years of the decade. Since its founding in 1903 as the Dallas Art Association, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts had traditionally garnered the leadership role of influence within the community as to the style of art and which artists were acceptable and collectible. Beginning in the early 1950s, this began to change with the establishment of more art galleries and the Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts. Through the Dallas art museums, art classes and education were offered to area students at public schools, colleges and universities. Art and art appreciation activities were heavily promoted by the museums who assumed a leadership role in offering a wide variety of classes for both adults and children. "As for its individual talents known beyond its city limits, Dallas has its goodly share."³⁵⁰ The list of more than sixteen "older" local artists which included Darge, also mentioned eleven artists as "maturing successor or newcomer" artists.³⁵¹

A Darge exhibit, "Ranch Country," was exhibited in the Rotunda Gallery of the West Texas Museum at Lubbock, Texas. Twenty-three paintings of the Bandy, Sierra Blanca and White Hat ranches of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Frost were exhibited.³⁵² Additionally, some of Darge's Palo Duro paintings and pieces of other West Texas ranches were included in this showing. Rotunda Gallery visitors viewed the exhibit from November 3rd through the 23rd.³⁵³ As with most

interviews Darge had done, he spoke to his desire to record the real ranch life as it was during his time. In so doing, he believed he was putting history to canvas and showing “life in that vast space of grandeur between the Rio Grande River and the Canadian Breaks.” ³⁵⁴ [Please refer to Chapter 15, titled Jack and Myrhl Frost Ranches for more comprehensive information.](#)

1961

The West Texas Museum at Texas Tech continued to offer programs and exhibits that promoted an interest and education in art and art appreciation. Selected works from recognized Texas and New Mexico artists, including Darge, were exhibited. ³⁵⁵

The YMCA of Dallas became involved with the arts in the spring when they hosted an exhibit in their lobby and cafeteria areas. Chapman Kelly and Otis Dozier had selected the artists and their paintings that were included in the exhibition. There were “80 vibrant, often brilliant, paintings by many Dallas artists” ³⁵⁶ on display from May 29th through June 15th. First, second and third place prizes were awarded for both contemporary and realistic art work. ³⁵⁷

1962

Some information about Darge would have remained unknown without critics for newspapers. One such informative article appeared in The New Mexican, the Santa Fe, New Mexico newspaper on Sunday, July 1, 1962. The Paint Pot Gallery had opened a “permanent exhibit” of ten paintings. ³⁵⁸ This critique must surely have been a favorite of Darge’s although we will never know exactly what he ever thought except for his often-expressed quote about his desire to paint the real life that he felt was slipping away to civilization. The critic, a Helen Peterson, wrote poignantly that “[o]ur American West has offered about as much drama and excitement as you are likely to find in any region of the world. And changing times have not nullified the glamor of the cowboy and the Indian—or altered the picturesque qualities of our Southwestern landscape.” ³⁵⁹

Peterson continued her affirmation of Darge as a “real artist,” one who “shows equal skill with close up, scenes from a distance, portraits or landscapes. In fact, his shadowed landscapes, mountains, and desert sketches are magnificent. His human figures are real enough to walk out of the canvas and drawl, “howdy,” to you. The horses are anatomically perfect and the colors.....are absolutely true.” ³⁶⁰

Two of the paintings were of Navajos – one of a man beside his hogan with his family looking through the doorway; another of a family herding their sheep. It was noted that the sheep are expertly painted. ³⁶¹ An Indian pueblo snow scene with horses hitched in the bitter cold illustrates Darge’s expertise with shadows. A street scene at Jemez Springs bursts with vivid color that perfectly recorded the vibrancy of the buildings and architectural features. Scenes of other paintings recorded ordinary life on a ranch – wrangling Herefords, packing up trails,

watching a cowboy shoe a horse, herding horses away from an approaching storm – all scenes from everyday life in the West. ³⁶²



Self Portrait, 12 x 16, Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts

Darge knew his subjects; his words illustrated a “tremendous sense of authenticity. He knows the gait of a horse, the cowman’s posture in the saddle, the daily affairs of ranch life. One almost smells the sweat and dust and leather. The Indians, too, are portrayed as human beings, not theatrical exaggerations.” ³⁶³ Peterson closed her article by stating that “[a]t the moment, he [Darge] is in Taos. We are told he is a fine person – and we can well believe it.” ³⁶⁴

By this time, Darge had been a professional artist for over three decades. He had been represented and promoted by the top galleries in Dallas and his works had been shown in a number of cities in Texas and other

states. During these more than thirty years, Darge appears to have kept his pace of traveling to paint, painting in his studio and entering exhibitions and showing at a number of different venues. Critics, people and patrons liked him and his art. They also worked with him and he was a part of the art scene in Dallas and in Texas.

1963

Darge was asked to participate as a juror for the selection of Reveau Basset paintings that would be exhibited at the February 17th meeting of the Oak Cliff Society of Fine Arts. They would be honoring Basset. ³⁶⁵

The West Texas Museum at Texas Tech, Lubbock, continued the “Art in Business” program that arranged for the loan of paintings to local businesses. One of Darge’s paintings was among the group of works that could be selected for a minimum annual donation of \$100. ³⁶⁶

On June 25th, Bill Wade, Auctioneer, held an auction of the entire contents of a “large home in University Park.” ³⁶⁷ Listed were “23 Outstanding oil paintings and water colors by foremost Dallas artists.” ³⁶⁸ Included in the listing was Darge.

Dr. Howard S. Aronson was a Dallas physician who enjoyed a wide variety of interests, including history. He was also an author of two children’s books. His book, *Zeb Pike*, was illustrated by Darge. The book is about Zeb Pike (Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike), who, in the very early 1800s, traveled to many parts of Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Colorado and into

Mexico. Pike's reports were of great importance to the information available at the time and the information he recorded contributed significantly to western expansion. In order to bestow the credit due Pike, Dr. Aronson was inspired to write Pike's story of his explorations and of the mountain that became known as Pike's Peak. Lt. Pike's reports are credited with inspiring people to make Texas their new home. Darge's illustrations for this book were provided by eleven full color paintings.^{369 & 370} Please refer to Chapter 16, titled Beyond The Big Bend for more comprehensive information.

Darge offered art lessons to small groups and individuals. Former Texas State Senator Judge Fred Red Harris was a student of Darge's beginning in 1963. Judge Harris' art works were later exhibited in the Dallas area. It is of interest to note that although the judge likely had an interest in the West prior to art lessons with Darge, he and Darge shared a similarity in subjects and style. Harris is quoted as saying he wanted "to put nature's wonders on canvas, so that others may too enjoy the panorama."³⁷¹

Teaching art was likely a welcomed source of income. Darge's financial condition throughout his life as a professional artist has never been known and that situation remains as such. He did, in fact, seek supplemental employment over the years although it is not known if he held jobs continuously or occasionally, perhaps when sales of his work were slow. The art markets generally have swings of buying and slow selling and the market of the mid-1900s was facing economic changes and adjustments across the nation for most citizens. As well, art markets were experiencing the change of style and genre choices among art patrons, collectors and museums. Darge had maintained the execution of his art for which he had become known – traditional, conservative, real life.

Clearly, the local art market and activities were markedly changing. Considering the number of exhibitions and miscellaneous art related programs and activities over the years since the end of the war, life for Darge had also changed. His beloved ranchers and ranches in the Big Bend were long gone by now. Even though he continued to travel and paint, available information is considerably less. Exhibitions in which he had previously and annually participated in had not been continued or the focus had changed as the years passed. The opening of the new Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts had likely impacted the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in regard to contributions, both financially and in acquiring collections. And, no doubt, there was competition between the two museums for exhibit and event attendance. Unfortunately, as with most all of Darge's life, the facts and the emotions he experienced are lost.



Artist Fred "Red" Harris at Easel, Circa 1970

1964

The annual tea and reception for the Klepper Art Club was hosted by Joseph Sartor Galleries, 4510 McKinney Avenue, Dallas, on Sunday, March 22, 1964. Darge was one of the members showing his work. ³⁷²

The Reaugh Art Club membership show and tea was held at Joseph Sartor Galleries on April 11th. Darge was represented by an oil painting. ³⁷³

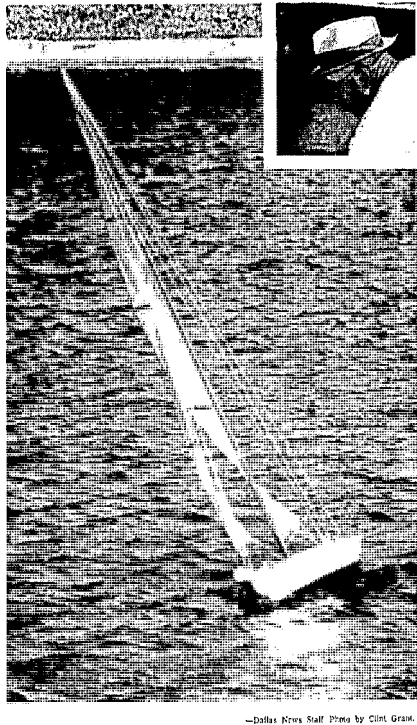
The 3rd Annual Coronado Inn Exhibit of Southwest Regional Art was held in Amarillo, Texas. Darge participates in exhibit. ³⁷⁴

1965

The book, *Zeb Pike*, authored by Dr. Howard S. Aronson and illustrated by Darge in 1963 was on the recommended "Texas Titles for Young Readers" list in early 1965. It was noted that the "paintings by Fred Darge give color and life to a brief story of Zebulon Pike, godfather of Pike's Peak." ³⁷⁵

Darge hosted the Frank Reaugh Art Club at his studio, 2720 East Kiest for an all-day sketching party from 8 a.m. until dark. A Miss Helen Evans and her committee were in charge of serving lunch. ³⁷⁶

Darge was represented in the permanent collection of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and in August, his work would be included in the permanent collection of the West Texas Museum at Texas Tech. Mr. and Mrs. George P. Kuykendall of Lubbock donated *Indian Summer in Palo Duro*. ³⁷⁷



The Dallas Morning News featured a photograph of Darge's miniature windjammer at Kidd Springs Park. It was a 36-inch wooden sailboat which had an "ingenious arrangement of the sails (that) causes it to turn and maneuver according to the wind."³⁷⁸ It was noted that the sailboat had taken "300 hours to build."³⁷⁹ Darge never lost his love of his hobby – making wood sailboat models. It is unfortunate that no information was available as it seems to have been a hobby that he had mastered and that provided a great deal of pleasure for him that was shared with other people.

The Dallas Telephone Directory of 1965 shows that Darge had moved from his long-time Keist Boulevard address to 915 North Crawford Street³⁸⁰ which was one of the two cottages that was part of Frank Reaugh's El Sibil property.³⁸¹ It would become his home for the next twenty-three years. El Sibil was across the street from Lake Cliff Park and a short distance from Kidd Springs Park. Darge appears to have favored Kidd Springs Park for sailing his model sailboats. Since the Kidd

Springs lake is much smaller than Lake Cliff's, it is plausible that Darge would be less likely to lose control of his sailboats in the smaller, more calm waters.

1966

Darge opened the year with an exhibit of his paintings at the Trinity National Bank in Dallas. The exhibition opened on January 24th through January 28th.³⁸²

The Klepper Art Club's annual spring show was held on Sunday, March 13, 1966 at the Joseph Sartor Galleries. Presidents of five arts clubs in Dallas "preside[d] at the silver services."³⁸³ Darge had been one of the arrangement committee members. It has been assumed that he had at least one painting in the exhibition.

The Frank Reaugh Art Club met on Friday, April 15th at Lake Cliff Park. Members met with Darge for the all-day sketching party. The other local art clubs (Aunspaugh, Klepper, Federation, Delta and Eades) and the Jessie Davis classes of the Dallas Public Evening School as well as anyone interested were invited to attend. The park was located at 300 East Colorado Blvd.³⁸⁴

A one-man show was held at the Rothman Gallery in Lubbock from November 3rd through the 23rd. It was reported that The Museum of Texas Tech University purchased *Indian Summer* for their permanent collection, however, verification was not attainable. This newspaper article could be an error.³⁸⁵

The trustees of the Frank Reaugh estate had sold El Sibil, Reaugh's home and studio to former student, Estha Josey in 1963.³⁸⁶ Her plan was to fulfill Reaugh's long held dream of establishing a creative arts center in Dallas.³⁸⁷ In 1966, important Mexican-American artist, Octavio Medellin formally founded the Octavio Medellin School of Sculpture.³⁸⁸

1967

The West Texas Museum at Texas Tech University again kicked-off their "Art in Business" program. For a \$100 annual subscription fee, businesses could select paintings to place in the offices and public areas of their businesses for four months. Subscribers selected three paintings that were delivered at four-month intervals for the enjoyment of both business owners and employees as well as for their customers.³⁸⁹

In December, twenty paintings from the permanent collection of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts were loaned to the McKinney Memorial Library, McKinney, Texas for the remainder of the year.³⁹⁰ Darge's *Survival of the Fittest* was included in the exhibition.

1968

Three artists, Darge, T. W. Alston and Judge Fred Red Harris, held an exhibition at the Creative Arts Center of Dallas, 122 East Fifth Street. The showing opened on Sunday, February 5th and closed on March 9th.³⁹¹ Prominent Dallas artist, Frank Reaugh (1860 – 1945) had made provisions in his will for his home, El Sibil, to be used as an art center. The Creative Arts Center provided numerous classes that taught painting, sketching and sculpture as well other media and promoted local artists and students by hosting exhibition events.

³⁹²

Members of the Frank Reaugh Art Club met on Friday, May 19th at Lake Cliff Park. Darge presented a demonstration on landscape painting.³⁹³

1969

A "Paint-Out"³⁹⁵ and picnic was held on Friday, May 20 at Lake Cliff Park for the members of the Frank Reaugh Art Club. Darge was the program presenter and did a painting demonstration.³⁹⁶

The fifth annual San Antonio Art Exhibition at the Witte Memorial Museum drew more than 700 art patrons at the opening in June. Mrs. E. Onderdonk, curator of arts was more than pleased with the response of those viewing oil paintings, water colors, drawing and etchings, sculpture and pottery which represented the works of 86 artists. Darge's painting was among the selected works that is mentioned as receiving numerous favorable comments.³⁹⁷

In September, the Irving Center for the Arts held an exhibit of works by Darge, Judge Fred Red Harris and T. W. Alston. ³⁹⁸

1970

From the 1950's to the 1970's, Darge's trips around Texas and to New Mexico were seldom mentioned in the few available articles regarding his art exhibitions. Reportedly, he traveled along the Texas Gulf Coast, the Big Bend, the Trans Pecos of far West Texas, New Mexico, the Texas Panhandle and Southcentral Oklahoma. It is not known when he changed vehicles, but sometime in the early 1950's, Darge acquired a "green Chevrolet panel truck" ³⁹⁹ that he used for his excursions. When he died in 1978, he owned a Ford van. ⁴⁰⁰ Apparently, Darge found life on the road easier and more convenient and economical when he had camping and studio facilities with him as he traveled.

Although there is no information about the vehicle he was driving in the summer of 1970, he was painting in the Big Bend Park when his friend, Nena Sadie Lee Burnham Nail died in Alpine on August 12th. Nena's daughter, Julia Nail Moss, had heard that Darge was in the park and managed to get word of her mother's death to him. Darge attended the funeral, and afterward, visited with Julia. It would be the last time the two would meet. ⁴⁰¹ Julia went on to say, "I will always remember Fred for his thoughtful kindness." [Please refer to Chapter 7, titled The Sam Nail Ranch for more comprehensive information.](#)

Ironically, it appears that Darge's 1970 trip was to be his last foray to the land that had for decades held his heart. His dedication to painting the natural wonders of the harsh and beautiful land was becoming an experience that would live on in his art. Even though there are no documents or any other resources to attest to the reasons, the few that have survived to the time of interviews generally believe that eye sight and the inevitable health problems associated with age as well as financial issues limited him in travel. Although 70 years of age, Darge most likely held a part time job to supplement his income from his art sales. He was known to have a sizeable number of paintings in inventory for sale.

1971

September 19th, the Frank Reaugh Art Club met at the home on Mrs. Robert H. Ruff, 7260 Elmridge. Mrs. Ruff presented the program. It was announced that this was the 50th Year Anniversary of the Club. The club meetings traditionally centered around painting demonstrations. This meeting was the first meeting of their new club year and the schedule for programs was announced. Darge would be the presenter for the May program. ⁴⁰³

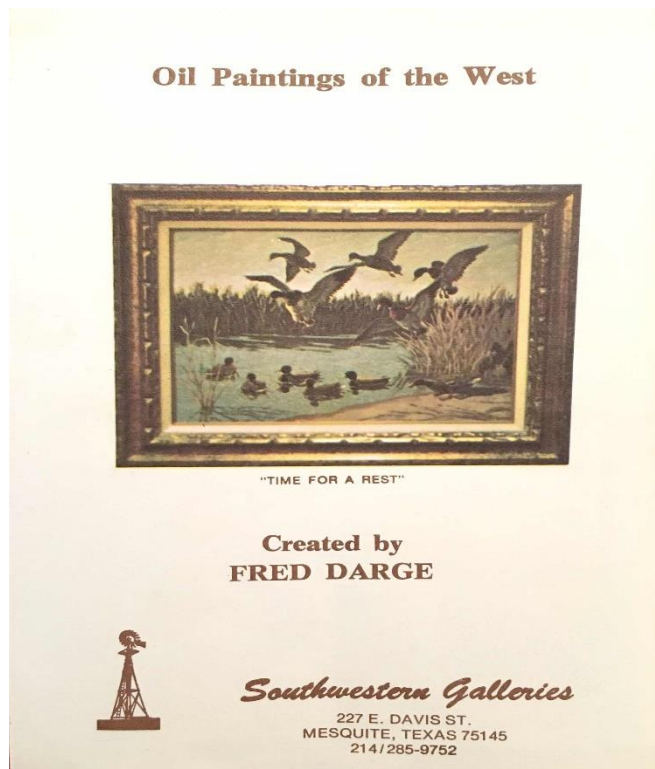
1972

By the time 1972 was a new year, between the years of art school and the years he considered himself an artist, Darge had been painting for nearly 50 years. Over the previous decade, his participation in exhibitions seems to have slowly declined. Although he continued to present programs and teach, his sales apparently decreased and he experienced severe financial stress. As his 72nd birthday on March 1st approached, declining health became an issue. Additionally, he could not seem to catch a break in the art market. The days of listing himself as an artist were drawing to a close. Darge's life savings consisted of his large inventory of unsold paintings and wood carvings, approximately 1,000 pieces of art. His project for the year was focused on selling the inventory.

Apparently, Darge's student, Judge Fred Red Harris, was aware of Darge's efforts to liquefy his vast inventory of unsold paintings and offered assistance. Judge Harris was an accomplished and respected individual. He was a former Texas Legislator, State Senator and Dallas County commissioner. He received letters in football, baseball, basketball and track at Baylor University. After college he played professional baseball with the St. Louis Browns. In the Navy, he was awarded the Navy Cross, Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts. Professionally, Harris was an industrial developer, farmer, rancher, cowhand, attorney, Judge of Dallas County Court at Law No. 3 and had been in the public relations business.⁴⁰⁴



Judge Harris loved the west and all its land and people and wanted to paint these scenes. Pursuing art as a hobby, he studied under Mrs. Oma Hayden and Darge.⁴⁰⁵ Harris and Darge developed a close friendship and Harris wanted to assist Darge with selling his art inventory. The arrangement between the two is unknown, whether Harris purchased or took the art on consignment, but Harris ended up with many paintings in his judge's chamber. Attorneys coming into his chamber would notice the number of paintings that were lined up along the walls and could not help but ask about them if they were curious. In turn, Harris could talk about the art and inform them that the paintings were for sale.⁴⁰⁶



One of the attorneys who conducted business in the judge's chambers was B. W. Cruse, a lawyer from Mesquite, a small incorporated city northeast of Dallas. Cruse also had a hobby - art. Cruse and his wife, Marlene, owned the Southwestern Galleries of Mesquite that specialized in the western art genre as well as wildlife paintings. Knowing Darge's plight of having an enormous number of unsold artworks he urgently wanted to sell, the Cruces offered to purchase the entire inventory. It is assumed that Judge Harris was aware of the offered price from Cruse, but since he was a third party, he could only advise Darge as best he could under the circumstances. When the deal was agreed on, Darge was certainly not rich, but his financial pressure was eased to a more comfortable level. ⁴⁰⁷

There is no information about when this transaction occurred during the year. According to Mrs. Cruse, after the collection was brought to the gallery, the Cruces hosted a number of exhibitions. Darge would attend the shows, but before the event closed, they would notice that Darge had quietly slipped out. ⁴⁰⁸ Darge has been quoted as saying that he was not really a very social person, and he proved that to be true. Unfortunately, his shy and stoic personality did not work in his favor at public events.

1973

Southwestern Galleries of Mesquite, Texas, owned by Mr. and Mrs. B. W. Cruse, Jr., held an auction to sell their acquired art by Darge. ⁴⁰⁹ The success of the auction is not available. Since there were no follow up auctions, one would assume that it may not have been successful, but the results were not what Cruse's expected.

1976



Mrs. Howard Dailey, Former president (1944) of Frank Reaugh Art Club and Fred Darge, Caretaker of El Sibil.

On November 14, 1976, El Sibil, the former home of famed early Texas artist, Frank Reaugh, was “dedicated and honored with an official Texas Historical marker.” ⁴¹⁰ A photograph accompanying the newspaper article shows Darge with a Mrs. Dailey with the marker in front of the home. ⁴¹¹ Notice that warm and friendly Texas size smile on the face of Fred Darge. No wonder he had so many friends and was so well liked.

1978

Sadly, Friedrich Ernst “Fred” Darge quietly died alone at his home and art studio located at 915 N. Crawford Street in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas on Monday, April 10, 1978. Darge, in all probability knew that he was not going to get rich as an artist and didn’t, but he certainly enriched the citizens of the State of Texas with a formidable legacy of his straightforward iconic artwork depicting the hard-working everyday ranchmen going about their daily lives of earning a living. His lifetime of recording early day ranch life beginning in the 1930’s in the Big Bend, West Texas and Beyond was a worthy effort that has now become a historical treasure. No one else even thought to do what Fred eventually accomplished. And, no one could have done it quite as well as Fred. This quiet friendly man that made so many long-lasting friendships with the people he visited and came in contact with throughout his life, is now gone.

CONCLUSION

When you look back at what Fred Darge intended to do with his art education after completing his studies at the Art Institute of Chicago it is fascinating for several reasons. The following paragraph explicitly states what Fred set out to illustrate. This concise paragraph was used by Lawrence Art Galleries to explain to their clients what Fred Darge was painting and why. His intentions are stated in simple easy to understand terms. It was his mission.

"I believe the simple, direct living of the pioneer people will soon come to an end. The Big Bend Country, with its abundance of beauty, is one of the few places where hardy pioneer people carry on as their forefathers. I want to register the ranchman as he lives today, his daily habits, his mode of living and doing business, before this part of the country gives way to progress and the civilization of the big cities, which today, in many instances, has taken the romance out of the West, paved roads instead of trails, automobiles instead of horses". Fred Darge – November 1941, Lawrence Art Galleries, Dallas, TX.

In his fifty years as an artist, Darge never veered from his initial goal of presenting “the ranchman as he lives today.” Unusual! Art history teaches us that artist, who painted their ideas and stuck to it, eventually achieved success. Darge knew what he wanted to accomplish and did it. It is unfortunate that art collectors are just now beginning to recognize Fred Darge for his idea and what he achieved. But then again, this is just one of the many complexities of collecting art and the art market that make it so interesting.

As authors and historians, we have made every attempt to piece together the many facts that we were able to locate. There are many other facts that will remain missing forever and lost in time. What we have been able to assemble is a story of a remarkable man on a mission with a set vision of what he wanted to accomplish. It has been a journey of both disappointments because of lack of information and pleasant surprises for what we have found. One thing is for certain, we have gotten to know a great artist and the people he came to know, who will

deservedly take his place in Texas art history as among one of the best, known for his paintings of authentic western genre and landscapes. He became one of the foremost chroniclers of ranch life in Texas in a very short period of time. Perhaps knowing more about Darge and his art will give historians and the art community a greater understanding of the remarkable talents of this outstanding artist. Current art collectors are just on the cusp of rediscovering this formerly overlooked artist that gave so much of himself to preserve the historical past. It is this colorful history of Texas that drives us all into the future.



Dreaming of Days Gone By, 18"x 40", Oil on Canvas, Courtesy of Grogan & Company