



**City of San Bernardino**  
**Historical and Pioneer Society**  
P.O. Box 875, San Bernardino, CA 92402  
[www.sbhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.sbhistoricalsociety.com)

## **LIBRARY NEWS SEPTEMBER 2012**

By Richard D. Thompson, Librarian

### **CARL SCHMIDT – SAN BERNARDINO’S ARTIST**

By Steven Shaw, President  
San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society

Carl Schmidt was probably the most prolific and best-known artist that called San Bernardino his home. Much of his work, especially the commercial variety, was San Bernardino-related and produced for local companies. By the time Carl died in 1969 at the age of 83, he had spent more than half his life, about 45 years, earning his living as an artist from San Bernardino.

Carl’s early years were influenced by his father, Fredrick Carl Schmidt, a farmer who was born in 1843 in Tuerstenfelde, Prussia, part of what is now Germany. In 1848, when Frederick was just five years old, his family emigrated to the United States, probably due to a cholera outbreak and the *Revolutions of 1848*. They settled in Lomira, Wisconsin, where Fredrick grew up. At the start of the Civil War in April 1861, Fredrick joined the Union Army, *Company H, 36th Illinois*. He served two enlistment periods, seeing many battles, and was even hit with a bullet that became a problem in later life. He was captured and taken as a prisoner, but he escaped and was in the war until the end in 1865.

Fredrick settled in St. Charles, Minnesota. In 1865, he quickly found a farm to live on and then married Augusta Zimmerman that same year. They had five children before she died in 1875. It was that year when he converted to the Evangelical Church. He became a preacher on probation, and in 1878 he was ordained as a deacon. Schmidt’s father and both of his brothers were Evangelical ministers.

In 1879, Fredrick Schmidt married Ellen A. Hacklander of Blue Earth, Minnesota. Together, they had three boys and two girls, Robert W., Rhoda M., Carl R., Mark E. and Emma L. That made a sizable family to raise, with the five children from his previous marriage.



**Frederick and Ellen Schmidt**

Carl Rubin Schmidt (the “Rubin” spelling comes from his draft registration card) was born on the family farm in St. Charles on March 14, 1885. He showed an innate talent for art, and the farm animals that he grew up with were great subjects for his drawings. His talent must have been evident, because he was soon studying at the Art Institute of Chicago. An artist that grew up on a farm was a natural for a job in the advertising department at the John Deere Company, where he worked for four years.

In 1906, Schmidt’s father died suddenly at the age of 62. By 1910, his mother, with his two sisters, had moved to San Bernardino. In 1924, at 39 years of age, Schmidt also settled in San Bernardino. The city was a great location for an artist who loved painting desert and mountain landscapes, as well as seascapes at Laguna Beach. He became a freelance commercial artist who would pack up his easel and paintbox when business got slow and set off for other places to paint his own favorite subject matter. In 1929, after Wall Street’s collapse, there was less call for his commercial talents, and he had even more free time to do the painting that he loved so well.

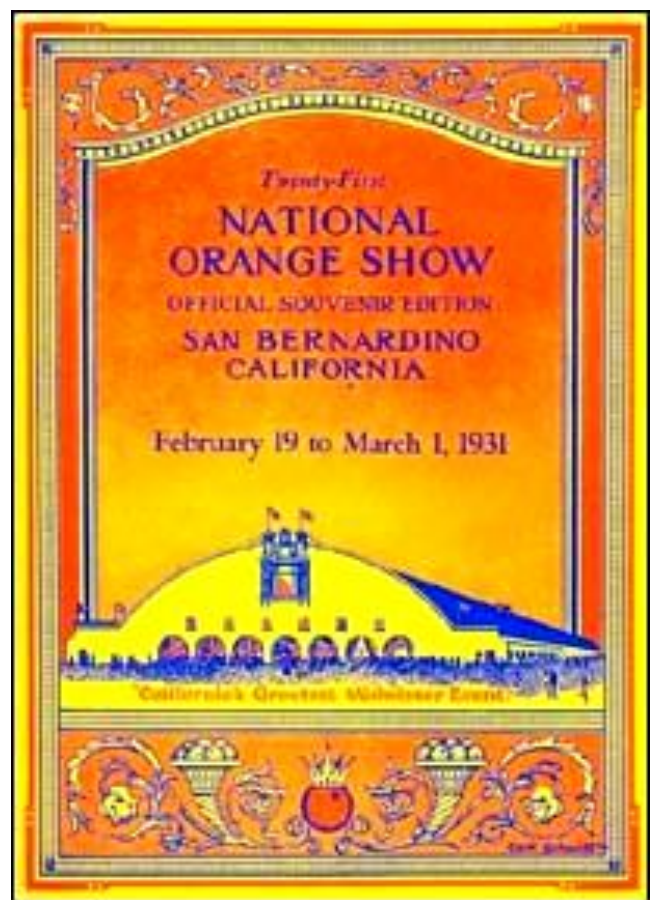
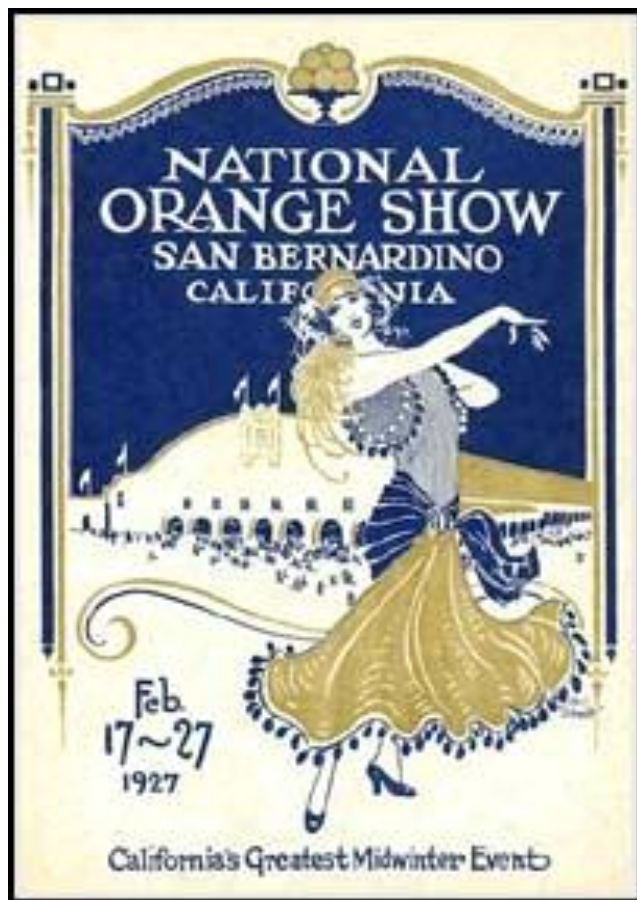


**Carl Schmidt capturing a desert scene on canvas**

The vast open space of the Southwest desert, along with its peace and tranquility, made it easy for Schmidt to keep working. Once he had visited the Navajo Reservation in Arizona, he knew that he had found his true calling. Besides landscapes and seascapes, paintings of Native Americans are some of Schmidt’s finest work.

During the winter months, Schmidt did artwork in his studio and also took on jobs as a commercial artist. He drew several program covers for the National Orange Show as well as other pamphlet covers, and even did artwork for lantern slides that promoted the City of San Bernardino. He also did the vibrant cover of a promotional booklet for the County of San Bernardino. The original artwork is now in our Historical Society library.

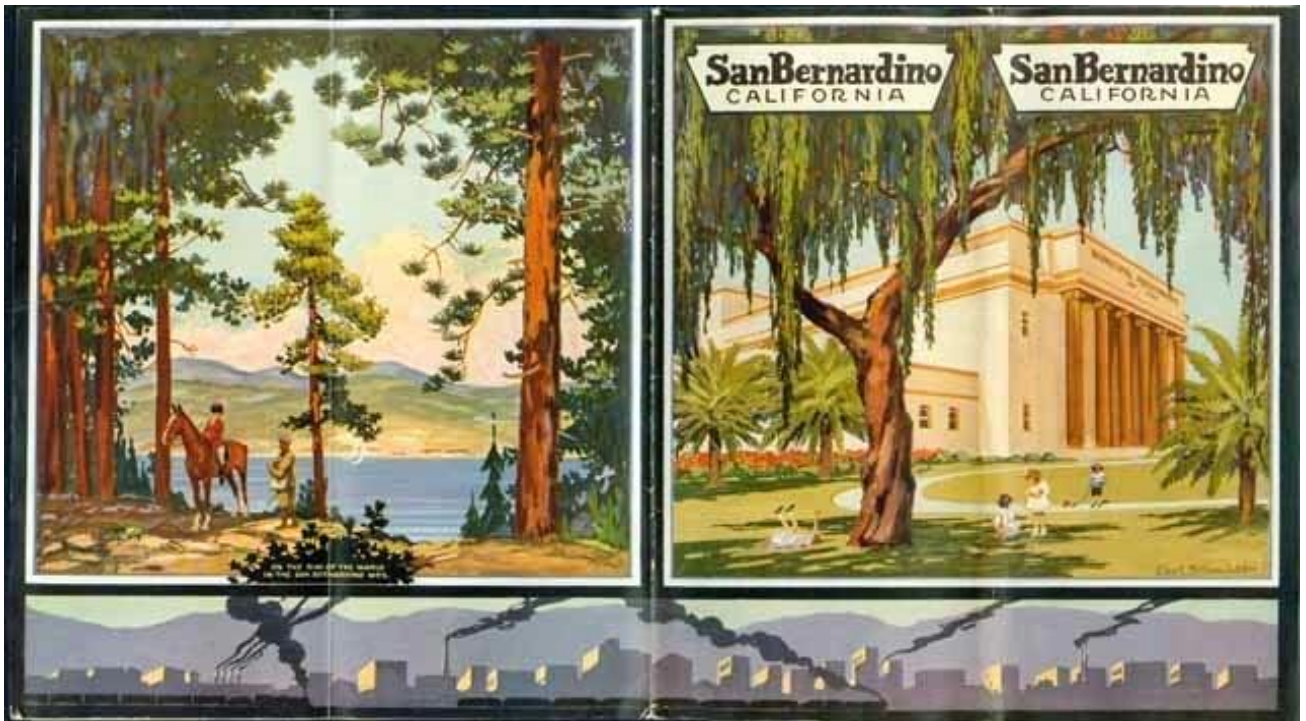




Two of several program covers Schmidt did for the National Orange Show



Close-up of artwork on Orange Show program shown above



Cover of a promotional booklet Schmidt drew for San Bernardino County

Doug Rickert, owner of Bud Rickert's Art Center in San Bernardino, was a child when he first met Carl Schmidt. Rickert's mother and father were both animators for Disney Studios, and in 1952 they opened the Art Center, selling a large array of supplies to artists of every skill level. Recently I visited Doug at the store, which has been doing business now for 60 years, and he told me that as a youngster he thought Carl Schmidt was just a mean old man who had little patience for children. Rickert commented that as time went by he could see that Schmidt was just *tightly wound*. He was "very focused on small details," Rickert said, "like numbering all his artwork that he did."



Self-portrait of Schmidt, currently under restoration at Bud Rickert's Art Center



As a collector of Schmidt's work, I have seen oil paintings with numbers over 1,000 written on the reverse side. However, I have also found oil paintings signed by Schmidt in the lower right corner (like all his oil paintings), with nothing written on the back. I am not certain why this is. His pencil/ink drawings and watercolors are not numbered either.

In August of 1940, *Desert Magazine* writer John W. Hilton, on one of his trips to the Arizona desert, met Schmidt on the Navajo Indian Reservation. At that time, it was the largest reservation in the United States for the Navajo tribe. Hilton noted in an article for the magazine that this was one of Schmidt's favorite places to paint. At the time of their meeting, Schmidt was 55 years old and still a single man. He would live out of his car, cooking meals on a campfire. From his years as a commercial artist, he acquired a strong work ethic and became a disciplined artist, painting almost every day.

Nine years later, on November 6, 1949, at the age of 64, Carl Schmidt finally found a suitable mate and married 51-year-old Lucille Sahr. Lucille was born in St. Cloud, Minnesota, less than 200 miles from Carl's hometown of St. Charles, but it is not certain where or when they met.



Carl and Lucille on their wedding day

In later years, Schmidt was confined to his bed due to illness. However, that did not stop him from painting by memory or with the use of photographs, using a special artist's easel mounted on his bed. On February 1, 1968, Rep. Jerry L. Pettis, R-Loma Linda, on the floor of the House of Representatives, read the following tribute to Schmidt:

Carl Schmidt: Desert Painter

## HON. JERRY L. PETTIS

OF CALIFORNIA  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 1, 1968

**M**R. PETTIS. Mr. Speaker, our beautiful desert, in San Bernardino County, Calif., attracts many artists who find a spiritual pleasure and inspiration in the space and silence, and the incredibly beautiful ever-changing colors in the desert scene. The sunrises and sunsets are spectacular. One of the best known landscape painters in the West is Carl Schmidt, who came to us from Minnesota and established much of his reputation with apt and memorable paintings of our desert, our Indian scenes, as well as still lifes, portraits, and historic and religious subjects.

When a farm boy in Minnesota, Carl's drawings of farm animals earned the encouragement of his teachers and neighbors, and he was advised to study at Chicago Art Institute. After 4 years advanced art training there, he won first prize in an institute contest and went on to become a professional artist.

Carl was lured to our vast western spaces, and liked what he found in the magnificent desert country. For the past 40 years he has given his talents

to creative painting, and I am very proud of the colorful painting of a serape and Indian bowl which not only decorates my office, but practically breathes the Indian lore which San Bernardino County loves. I invite my colleagues to visit my office and see it for themselves.

This artist is too gifted and sincere, to much a man of vision and artistic discipline, to permit illness and being bedridden for years, to stop his splendid work. He continues—bigger than illness—to paint, and his work continues to inspire a new appreciation for the subjects he loves. His works of art have had many showings, including one-man exhibits at the Stendahl, Webb, Paschte, and Laguna Galleries, at the San Bernardino Cultural Center and the Los Angeles County Museum. He holds membership in the San Bernardino Art Association, the Traditional Artists Association, and the Laguna Art Guild.

Mr. Speaker, we westerners are proud of Carl Schmidt, and we believe his works of art will endure.



Indian Artwork

Congressman Jerry Pettis mentioned in the above tribute that he had a colorful Schmidt painting of a "serape and Indian bowl"

On February 14, 1969, Carl Schmidt died at his home at 17th and Sierra Way, one month before his 84th birthday. A memorial exhibit of his work was held at the Municipal Auditorium in San Bernardino. He is now listed in most of the important art publications as a well-known "California Impressionist" and landscape painter of the West. His favorite subject was no doubt the desert and the people and animals that lived there. The light of the desert sky is well represented in some of his best paintings. Schmidt's paintings varied in size from the small (8" x 10") to large murals. A religious mural painted by Schmidt can be seen at the Trinity United Methodist Church at 224 East 16th Street, where he was a member. It is dedicated to "the youth of the community and the church."

Schmidt's paintings have had many showings, including one-man exhibits at the Stendahl Galleries in Los Angeles, the Laguna Galleries, the San Bernardino Cultural Center and the Los Angeles County Museum. He was a member of the San Bernardino Art Association, the Traditional Artists Association and the Laguna Art Guild.

After his death, his wife Lucille donated several of his Western paintings to the San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society, where they are still displayed. The Society has even purchased one or two more, and has received a few more by donation. The public is welcome to see these paintings every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and the first Thursday of each month from 6 p.m. until about 9 p.m.

I have a personal interest in Carl Schmidt and collect his art. About thirty-plus years ago, my mother was talking about her father (my grandfather). His brother was Henry Marcus Moran, a semi-famous artist. My grandfather was also a natural-born artist, and was even offered a job by Walt Disney, but my grandmother didn't want to move. My mother had bought a couple of Carl Schmidt's paintings, and she told me that my grandfather and Carl Schmidt were good friends. My interest grew from that. Plus, he is *San Bernardino's Artist*.



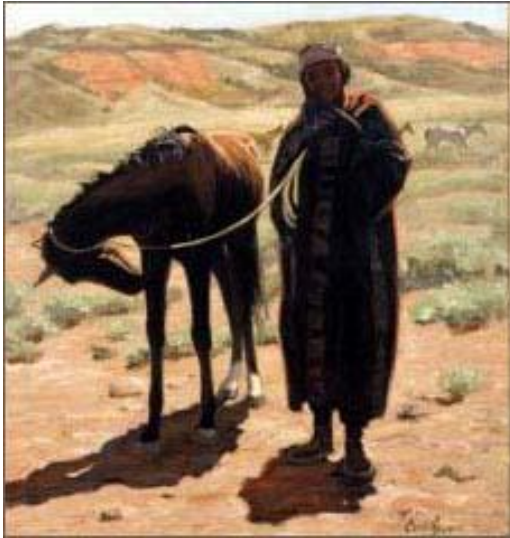
The Navajo Indian Reservation was one of Schmidt's favorite places to paint

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**FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF CARL SCHMIDT'S ARTWORK**



## Native Americans



Totachee, Red Water



Grand Canyon



Scouting Party



Navajo Woman



The Calico Roan



## The West



Canyon Riders



Western Town



Two Cowboys



Chin Lee — Thunderbird Trading Post



Hilltop Riders — 1930

## Pioneers



Pioneer Family



Mormon Settlers



Heading West



## On the Farm



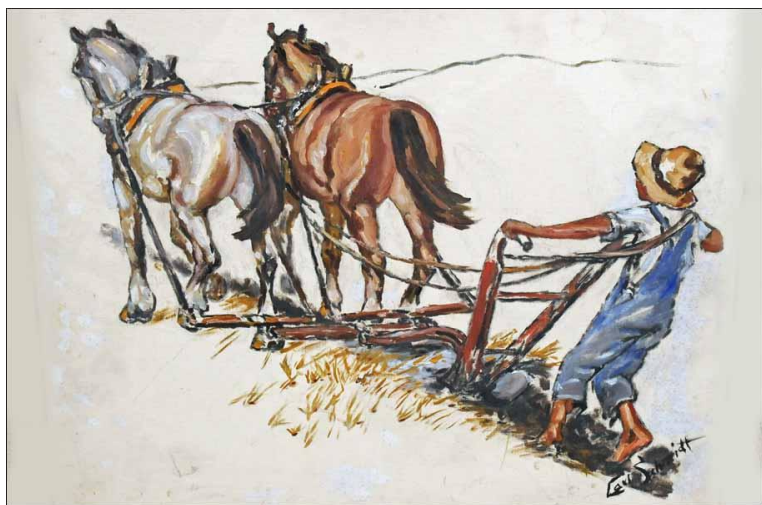
Plow Horses



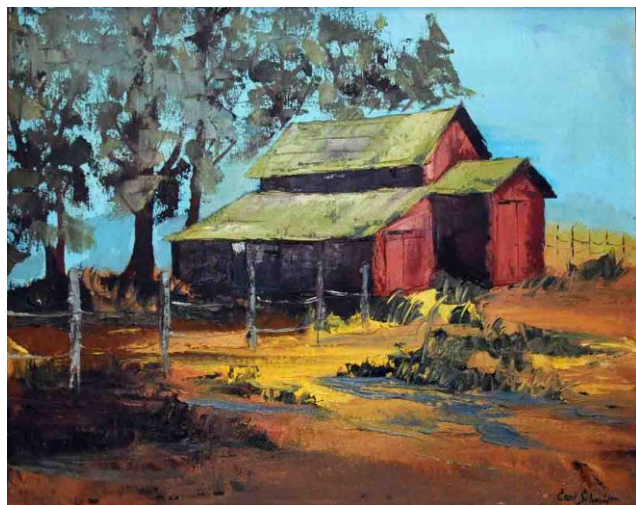
Watering Trough



The Pig Farmer



Plowing the Field



Red Barn



## Structures



Adobe Ranch House



Laguna — Saddle Back Mountain



Railroad Yard, California



Seaside Shanty



Fourth Street Grist Mill



## San Bernardino



Third Street, San Bernardino — 1906



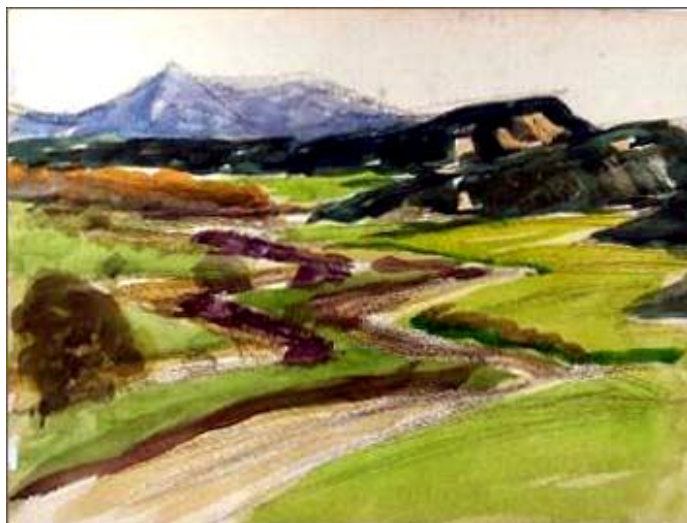
Mt. Harrison, San Bernardino



## Scenic Views



Sheltered Dunes



Winding Trail



Irvine Ranch, Laguna



Carmel Coast



Eucalyptus Trees



Early Morning Desert

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