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by Charles Raskob Robinson Brush Hill Studios, Washington, CT

For twenty years this column has focused on ASMA artists, their life stories, approaches to their art, their techniques and tools in order to introduce our members to each other so that we all might learn from the experiences of our colleagues. In the last issue we went "Down East" and met New England Signature Member Edward William Parker and learned about his unique, colorful, engaging and wellexecuted paintings based on humorous vignettes of American life and folklore. In this issue we "go Down South" to meet the Georgia born and raised artist, Debra Sanders Nadelhoffer.

DEBRA SANDERS NADELHOFFER

MEMBER, Dawsonville, GA Website:

www.debranadelhoffer.com

"It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing."

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) From an 1787 letter to his wife, Martha.

She does get about. In fact, I was fortunate to find her home in Dawsonville, Georgia to interview for this article for in recent weeks she conducted an outdoor workshop in The Bascom Center for the Visual Arts in Highlands, NC, was a Featured Artist at the Door County Plein Air Festival in Fish Creek, WI and is now in Port Clyde, Maine. ASMA Signature Member Mary Erickson, who lives in North Carolina, invited her to join other artists – including ASMA Fellow Don Demers – to spend a week painting and doing as they wish but



"Winter's Sleep" - 18" x 24" - Oil on Linen

to gather and share dinners together.

And she is busy: While doing all of this, she participated in the following exhibitions that have occurred or are about to: The American Impressionist Society 16th National Juried Exhibition, the American Women Artist 2015 National Juried Exhibition, the American Women Artist 2015

Online Juried Show, the Southeastern Wildlife 2015 Exposition, the Oil Painters of America 2015 Juried Salon Exhibition of Traditional Painting, the American Society of Marine Artists 16th National Exhibition and the 2015 ASMA South Regional Exhibition.

A Story of Dedication and Perseverance

"Perseverance is the hard work you do after you get tired of doing the hard work you already did."

"Newt" Gingrich, (b. 1943) Georgia Representative to the U.S. House of Representatives from 1979 to 1999. The course of Debra's career was not easy and not always clear but she kept at it and eventually things fell into place. It is an inspiring story.

Although Debra recounts that ever since she was a child she loved color and the creative process, she did not come from an Egeli or Blossom family that produced generation after generation of artists. Her mother, Joyce, was a teacher and guidance counselor whose art was limited to doing pastels as a kid while her father, James, was a salesman for Gulf Oil Company. "I was constantly coloring and dancing as a kid and did all of the things Southern girls did but my mother felt that unless I showed some genius in one of these fields (which I did not), she was not going to pay for lessons to develop any of these talents." Moreover, the family was constantly on the move since her father was given different markets to work for Gulf Oil. Debra was born on November 12, 1950 in Atlanta, GA and two

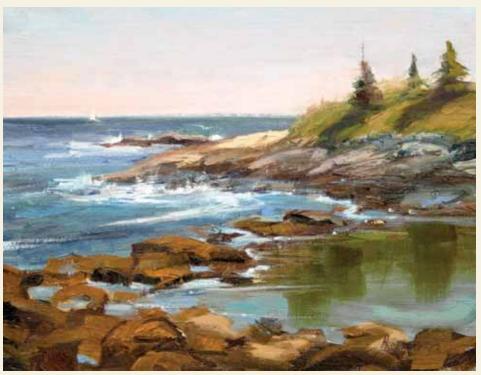


sisters followed as the family moved on to Jacksonville, FL (where Debra remembers being exposed to the maritime world when she used to visit the port and Navy ships stationed there on school trips), St. Augustine, FL and Savannah, GA. However through all of this she remained interested in art and in 1968 when she attended college at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, GA and then transferred to the oldest state-chartered university in the United States, the University of Georgia in Athens, art remained her major.

Typical of art departments then and, unfortunately still today, "art" in these Georgia universities was modern art and, if one had any interest in representational or traditional academic art, one better look elsewhere. With Southern graciousness, Debra merely says, "My sort of art was not encouraged. Everything was abstract so I had to find my own way outside of established education. In any case, it was a turbulent time and not the usual peaceful learning environment. It was the era of the Kent State shootings and the Viet Nam protests, etc. and the University of Georgia was not immune."

However, her art and studies, such as they were, came to an end after her second year in college in 1970 when she met and married a graduate student at the University of Georgia. They began a family with the arrival of T. J. Smith, Jr. in 1972 and Heather in 1975.¹ Nevertheless, her interest in art continued. "As a stay-at-home mom, I was pretty much self-taught with an occasional workshop. I started in watercolor. At that time we lived fifty miles north of Atlanta and art supplies in other mediums were hard to find but watercolor was popular and available. I did a lot of reading on

(Footnotes)



"Salt Pond Preserve" - 9" x 12" - Oil on Linen

my own and found instructional books by North Light Publishing particularly helpful." (Several ASMA artists have contributed to North Light books over the thirty years they have been publishing, including eleven members who wrote the chapters for the 1997 book *Painting Ships, Shores and the Sea: 26 Step-by-Step Demonstrations in All Mediums*! edited by Rachel Rubin Wolf²).

"In 1982 my life took a dramatic change. I got divorced and went back to school to learn about computers so that I could get a job." She went to Lanier Technical College in nearby Gainesville (part of the Technical College System of Georgia) and enrolled in their Data Processing program. "There I learned how

⁴ The company has offices in forty countries, has nearly 13,000

to program main frame computers (skills which were quickly outdated as desk top computers became more and more powerful and software more advanced) and also learned business applications. It was a one-year program so I got my degree and was out and looking for a job as soon as classes were over. I found work close to home, as an Administrator at North Georgia College and State University in Dahlonega³ while my children were little. When they got older, I took a job in Atlanta at a computer software company as an Administrative Assistant. In time, Computer Associates International bought the company and I was offered a job to stay on. I remained there ten years until 2003 and served as a Sales Administrator, Education Coordinator, and, finally, a Client Based Representative

employees and holds nearly a thousand patents worldwide with a similar number pending. Its computer software products are used by thousands of industries, including a majority of the Fortune Global 500 companies, government organizations, educational institutions, etc. They earned \$4.4 billion in revenue in 2014.

⁶From an on-line lecture by Marc Chatov

¹ T. J. (Terry Jack) Smith now is married and he and Alison have two children, Olivia (11) and Sawyer (7) and they live near Debra. Heather is married to Chris Strack who recently retired from the Army and they live in Chester, VA.

² The ISBN for this full color, 144-page, hard cover book is: 0-89134-787-9. The eleven ASMA members were, alphabetically: The late Willard Bond; Marc A. Castelli; Peter E. Egeli; James Drake Iams; Dee Knott; George F. McWilliams; Leonard Mizerek; the late Yves Parent; Charles Raskob Robinson; Robert C. Semler; and Lois Salmon Toole.

³ Interestingly, in light of her next job at the University of Georgia, North Georgia College and State University was established as the agricultural branch of the University of Georgia

in 1873 and, as such, was the second oldest public institution of higher education in the state – second only to the University of Georgia, which was incorporated by an act of the General Assembly in 1785 and thereby became the first state chartered, state supported university in America. North Georgia College, renowned for its ROTC program, it was eventually designated as The Military College of Georgia – one of six senior military colleges in the United States. And, given ASMA's increasing ties with Gainesville, GA whose Quinlan Visual Arts Center will host our 17th National in 2017, it is noteworthy that North Georgia College consolidated with Gainesville State College in 2013 to become the University of North Georgia.

⁵ He escaped to New York following the Bolshevik Revolution, studied at the Art Students League and became a portrait painter before moving to Atlanta where he became an established feature in art circles.

working directly with clients and their software licensing. It was a hard job and involved a good bit of travel but it was great training and kept me in touch with the latest in technology. I am not sure where Computer Associates is ranked now, but at the time it was one of the top software sales and development companies in the world. I was lucky to have worked in such a fast paced environment." Indeed, "fast paced": Currently known as CA Technologies, this New York headquartered company remains one of the largest independent software corporations in the world.⁴

In addition to being a single mother and making the one to two-hour commute to Atlanta and traveling for her job, Debra struggled to continue her art education. "When my children were young, I worked during the day and painted at night and on the weekends. Then, as they were finishing high school and leaving for college, I would get up at 4:30 in the morning, start painting at 5 and paint for about an hour and a half and then get ready to leave for work. I was able to focus on my art education and took a lot of classes after work. I was younger then and had a lot of energy. Even so, I was tired on the way home late at night but usually was ready to go the next morning."

During these years she studied figurative art in Atlanta with Marc Chatov (b. 1953) whose influence she credits for her growth as an artist. Son of the colorful, Russian born artist and costume designer Roman Gregory Chatov (1900 - 1987)⁵, Marc Chatov is probably responsible for some of the techniques Debra has developed, like seeing her work through the eye of a camera. Chatov advises, "Artists often view their work in terms of what it should look like and overlook what it does look like. Remove yourself from being the critic and just see the painting as it is. Often times the painting has a life of its own, revealing that which is unseen and makes it visible - like the artist's passion."6 Debra says she uses the mirror approach to get her distance from the work but she finds "a photograph of the painting is the best way for me to remove myself from the painting. What I see is an image that is not mine and I can step away from it more



"Forgotten Beach" - 18" x 36" - Oil on Linen

objectively and see what it has to offer."

She also studied under Margaret Dyer, who moved from New York to Atlanta, studied under Roman Gregory Chatov and has been active in pastel and teaching circles for the last twenty years. As noted, Debra began painting in watercolor and did so for many years. "But I never felt a strong connection with the medium. There was always a need to connect, more hands on, with the medium and felt pastels were a natural step in that direction. I loved the drawing aspect of working with pastels and continued my journey in this realm with Southeastern Pastel Society and served as its President for seven years. There were so many great artists to learn from and I grew a lot during that time. I am proud to be a Signature Member of that organization."

Plein Air: The New World

"Everything in nature contains all the powers of nature. Everything is made of one hidden stuff."

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) **Compensation**, in Essays: First Series, 1841

A watershed event in her development and career as an artist occurred when she took a pastel workshop with Albert Handell (b. 1937) in Santa Fe, NM. Born in Brooklyn, NY and schooled at the Art Students League in New York for a number of years, Albert Handell continued his studies in Europe before settling New

Mexico where he has developed a national reputation among collectors and museums and a following for both his "mentoring programs" and workshops in pastels. "It was my very first experience with plein air and opened a whole new world. Working outdoors directly from nature has become an important tool that has allowed me to continue my own education about art - I learn every time I am out there. After attending his workshop, Albert asked me in 2005 if I would be willing to coordinate a workshop for him in Dawsonville, GA. I did and over a period of six or seven years continued to manage several five-day workshops for him in the Dawsonville area where we painted rivers and farms in this area of northern Georgia. In my estimation he is one of the best out there especially in pastel. His paintings are still magical to me and I am grateful for my time working with him."

Pastels led Debra to plein air. Then in 1997 she decided to work in oils because she could easily mix her paints on location and she felt there was a better market for oil paintings. Moreover, she had been spoiled by the "jewel" nature of pastels and oil paint, in contrast to watercolors, offered that brilliance. Ever the initiator, the following year she found that "there were several of my friends who liked or wanted to paint plein air so we gathered a group of a couple of dozen together called the Plein Air Painters of Georgia to paint and



"Path from the Beach" - 12" x 16" - Oil on Linen

learn together about once a month. Doors opened to us because of our roster and we began having exhibits, the first being at the Quinlan Visual Arts Center in Gainesville, GA. This went so well, we were able to schedule an exhibition annually and we did this for nearly a dozen years before we disbanded. (The Quinlan has hosted an ASMA South Regional Exhibition and will host the Society's 17th National in 2017.) These plein air activities laid the foundation for the next chapter of an active teaching.

Before turning to her teaching accomplishments, it is interesting and somewhat surprising to see the relationship between her plein air painting and her work in the studio. First and foremost, plein air is her classroom - where she learns the most. "I started to teach myself with books and an occasional workshop but the best is learning from life - direct painting in nature. I am trying to catch up by using plein air. When on location I start with an idea but sometimes the painting has a different idea and things change. I can't see the finished painting from the start. Things happen in the process for me and, if lucky, happy accidents. I gather information and experiment in the plein air process but generally do not sell these works. I keep them for reference in the studio or occasionally give them to be auctioned for some benefit. In composing a work for a studio painting, I will review the plein air studies as well as photos I have taken to help recall the light, sounds and smells of the day which helps create a sense of place in the larger studio work. Then I make some sketches – some ideas – for the studio work that I can sleep on overnight. These then become the basis for my work in the studio the next day.

From Learning to Teaching

"The one exclusive sign of thorough knowledge is the power of teaching." Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

She has taught and painted on location various places in the United States and throughout Georgia. As noted earlier, this summer she led a workshop at The Bascom Center for the Visual Arts in Highland, a town located just over the state border in western North Carolina on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau in the southern Appalachian Mountains. This was her second workshop there. This quite extraordinary art center began with a vision a New York set designer and theatrical producer, Watson Barratt, had. He married Louise Bascom who was born in Highland to pioneer settlers there. (Her mother was a Crockett.) Louise was a Wellesley College graduate and a successful writer and editor in New York. They escaped New York to summer in Highland where they had a house and actively supported the arts. Through gifts from the Barratt estate, the vision to establish a permanent gallery in Highland for the display of works created by regional artists materialized and in the thirty years since then Highland, a village of just a few hundred residents, became known as a progressive community committed to nurturing local talent and to celebrating its natural assets. In 2009 The Bascom Center occupied a newly constructed, architectdesigned, six-building, six-acre campus with an entranceway covered bridge built in the early 1800's and moved from New Hampshire. At its heart is a 27,000 square



"The Crane" - 8" x 10" - Oil on Linen

foot architectural jewel featuring historic materials in a modern setting and a very active, multi-faceted arts program which for two years now has featured Debra's workshops. She notes, "The Bascom pulls from North Carolina, Georgia, and I think South Carolina. You weave through several states driving up there and it is a long winding road. It is a beautiful center with mountains, waterfalls and streams – a different place altogether and we have the ability to work outside and inside."

Debra has participated in the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition for the last couple of years and has been invited back for the 2016 event. Held in Charleston, SC

in the winter months, usually in February around Valentine's Day, this three-day event – this "Celebration To Preserve A Way of Life – Ours" - has been bringing together sportsmen, conservationists, artists, sculptors, artisans, fans and collectors for over three decades. Through



"Alligator Pond" - 11" x 14" - Oil on Linen

a program of scheduled events - from fine art exhibits, conservation education, sporting demonstrations and socializing the Exposition focuses on beauty found in nature. "I do some wildlife paintings here and there, sporting dogs mainly because my son is a hunter, but mostly I take paintings of landscapes, a lot of marshes and some birds. It is a great show and so much fun and I find my ASMA friend there, Kim Shaklee with her beautiful sculpture. Next February is closer than you think so I have to begin painting for the 2016 show now." Among the paintings Debra exhibited this year at the Exposition was Alligator Pond.

She does not limit her canvas to the South. For instance, this summer far to the north in Wisconsin, she participated in an event in Door County - a beautiful peninsula that juts into Lake Michigan. Last year she received an invitation to join forty other artists from across the country to be featured artists in the 2015 Door County Plein Air Art Festival, which is the largest such event in the Midwest. "I was thrilled to be invited to this and fell in love with the area." Other artists over the generations have felt the same way about Door County. During the Twentieth Century an art colony developed there, as artists from throughout the Midwest were attracted to the waterfronts and farms of the peninsula. Fifty years ago this gave rise to the establishment of the Peninsula School of Art in the port town of Fish Creek on the north end of the peninsula. The School is the sponsor of the Plein Air Festival.

Closer to home, Debra has been teaching weekly classes at Chastain Art Center in Atlanta, GA for eleven years. This is the oldest arts center in Atlanta and is run by the Atlanta Office of Cultural Affairs. She began while still working for Computer Associates, teaching one night a week. When she left her job to pursue art full time in 2003, she began to teach two classes a week in seasonal programs that ran all year. In addition, since 2009 she has also conducted about three workshops annually one of which is in the winter on the coast in Apalachicola, FL and the others in the mountains of northern Georgia. "This schedule and my students keep me on my toes. I work hard to stay ahead of them and give them something they can use. My students are great friends, and I am lucky to have them."

The Support Team

Another important development in Debra's life was meeting Tom Nadelhoffer in 1984 and marrying him the following year. At the time he worked in Atlanta for Delta Airlines and then Worldspan. Worldspan was formed in the early 1990s by Delta Airlines and a couple of other carriers to operate and sell its Global Distribution System (GDS), which was used by travel agents and travel related websites to book airline tickets, hotel rooms, rental cars, tour packages and associated products. Tom is now retired and has two children, Thomas and David, and a grandson, Walker, by a previous marriage.

Aside from being a spouse, he has played an important role in Debra's art career. "Tom is the best, without him I could not do what I do. He has always encouraged my art and helps me with everything, from making frames and linen boards and Masonite panels for plein air painting to packing my boxes and gear for trips. Having him makes my life work." Tom made a much more significant contribution to Debra's career when he encouraged her to retire from her computer software job in 2003 and follow her bliss by becoming a full time fine artist. She has brought the same dedication and energy to her new career and, as it happened, it allowed her more time to enjoy Tom's company as he pursued his passion for antique sports cars on long distance rallies that have presented her with new painting locations of beautiful places and new gallery opportunities.

He is a member of the Peachtree MG Registry (Georgia is the "Peach State") and has two MGs. Debra reports, "One runs and one only half runs." To transport their luggage and her painting gear on these long



Maritime Museum and Badger

distance trips, Tom built a trailer for the MG (the one that runs). Last year they made a thousand-mile trip to Mackinac Island, MI located in the straights between Lakes Michigan and Huron. As documented in the **Naval War of 1812** video the Society made for the 1812 Bicentennial, Mackinac Island was an American fortified outpost on the Canadian border in the early Nineteenth Century and saw the first action of the War when it fell to the British in a surprise raid. Debra's visit was more productive: She visited Mackinac's Little Gallery on



"Training Day" - 24" x 30" - Oil on Linen

the Island where she met the owner, Becki Barnwell who recalls, "Debra came into Mackinac's Little Gallery, loved the space, the artists and our display and asked if we accepted artists from other states. She then sent me images of her work, which I immediately responded to with favor. I love her work."⁷

Finding ASMA and New Horizons

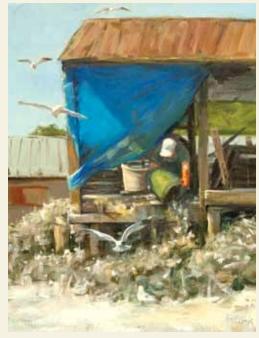
"I love the sea and the coast and, if I don't get down there several times a year, I get depressed. Even up here in the mountainous terrain of northern Georgia I love to find water – a stream, river or lake. And it is not just the coasts down here. My husband and I have been going to Maine for summer visits for the past twenty years. I love Maine and applied for the Artist in Residence Program at Acadia National Park a couple years ago and was accepted. Acadia preserves much of Mount Desert Island and associated smaller islands off Maine's mid-coast and is the oldest National Park east of the Mississippi. So

(Footnotes)

in September 2012 Acadia gave me a free place to stay for two weeks and in return I did a children's program one evening (taught a mixed media class for kids up to ninth grade) and the next week was scheduled to take out a group of adult painters but that did not materialize. They also gave me a studio space to work in while I was there. It was fun going around the park painting the landscape and sea on location and finishing up the works in the studio. Acadia also asked that I give them a piece of work done from my stay there and I had up to a year to send it back to them. They auctioned it to raise money to support the program, which I thought was great."

"This basic interest in water plus the urging from my dear Georgia friend and neighbor, ASMA Signature Member Anne Brodie Hill, led me to join the American Society of Marine Artists soon after I became a full time artist. My first ASMA National was the **Thirtieth Anniversary Exhibition** in 2008 – 2009. Since then I have been juried into all of the ASMA National Exhibitions and the recent ASMA South Regional at the Gadsden Arts Center in Quincy Florida. Because of this success, I decided that I should try for more national exhibition exposure with other organizations. I get into some and some I don't, but this is part of the process. It certainly keeps me humble." As we saw in the opening paragraphs, her successful participation in six national exhibitions in recent months is hardly grounds for humility! And she has been successful in broadening her organizational ties for, in addition to ASMA and her Signature Membership in the Southeastern Pastel Society, she is a member of the Oil Painters of America, the American Impressionist Society, American Women Painters and a Signature Member of the Women Painters of the Southeast.

In addition to providing national exposure for her work, ASMA has some of her favorite artists. "I couldn't begin to list them all. The level of excellence within the Society is hard to compare. Outside ASMA I find myself leaning to more impressionistic work, but love so many different styles of painting. There are so many great artists, it is hard to say whose work I love the most, but here are a top few that come to mind. I have not been



"Dinner Time" - 16" x 20" - Oil on Linen

fortunate enough to go to Spain and visit the Sorolla Museum in Madrid ⁸, but I have visited the Hispanic Society of America Art Museum and Gallery in New York City and it is impressive. The work by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863 – 1923) blew me away when I walked into the room covered in his

⁷ Other galleries that represent Nadelhoffer are: the Frameworks Gallery in Marietta, GA; the Burton Gallery in Clarkesville, GA; and the On the Waterfront Gallery in Apalachicola, FL.

⁸ Those who can visit Madrid should know that Tripadvisor.com ranks the Museum as the #5 of the 614 things they list to do in that city.

very large paintings. There is an energy and life to the paintings that you feel. The size is monumental. I decided that he was my favorite of all time and think is every artist's dream to have left such a piece of yourself behind that continues to amaze viewers. I love the brushwork, light and color, subject matter...all of it.

I also love the beautiful brushwork, movement, energy and light of John Singer Sargent (1856-1925). The oceans of William Trost Richards (1833-1905) are beautiful in their atmosphere, movement of the waves and rock formations. I love his subtlety of color and light in his coastal scenes. Richard Schmid (b. 1934), who begins his paintings with transparency and adds subsequent layers of paint that you can see through, has had a huge influence in how I begin my paintings. He goes for the focal point and builds around it with just the right amount of detail. Albert Handell has always been a favorite with his careful composition and abstract beginnings. He lays in transparently in loose washes and builds his painting from there."

In her plein air painting, Debra is attracted to the "chaos" of nature. "To paint the chaos abstractly but in an impressionistic way is a challenge and a joy. Taking my paintings out of the realm of just copying what I see to making a painting that the viewer can feel and participate in is my goal." In this vein she relates to the atmosphere in paintings by Douglas Fryer (b. 1963), a Utah artist who also finds the chaotic forces of nature profoundly interesting. Echoing the observations about the "unseen" in art made by Debra's teacher Marc Chatov, Fryer holds that the chaos found in plein air landscapes might embody under a natural appearance the notions of unseen things outside or inside of the physical world. This same interest in atmosphere has drawn Debra to the works of Kathleen Dunphy (b. 1963) a California artist (who, incidentally, was inducted into the Plein Air Painters of America at the same time ASMA Fellow Joseph McGurl was in 2012), Michael Workman (b. 1959) another Utah painter and the native Texas tonalist, Nancy Bush.

Upon reflecting on the larger scope of her work and career, Debra notes, "I am not a religious person but I am a spiritual one. Being in nature whether painting or just sitting and observing touches that spiritual part of me where I connect with God." Debra has come full circle: She set out to learn, mostly teaching herself, and continues to do so teaching others. Her advice to young artists is:

"If you know you want to paint... don't wait. Do everything you can to learn everything you can right now. The thing about being an artist is that, the more you learn, the more you find you need to know. It never ends. It will keep you searching for the rest of your life and it is a lifestyle, not a job. Doors will open for you that will take you on some of the most amazing journeys."

ASMA Fellow Don Demers, who is one of Debra's favorite artists, reported from Maine following his meeting Debra and others at Mary Erickson place in Port Clyde:

"Debra was a student of mine as well as in a workshop that Anne Brodie Hill arranged in Gainesville, GA and we've painted together since then.

What I can say about Debra is that her commitment, passion, dedication and devotion to her work are exceptional. She invests deeply in her work, both technically and visually, and her selection and choice of subject usually carry a theme that is very important to her. She's way beyond 'making pretty pictures.'"

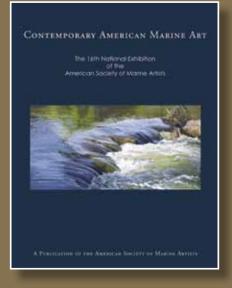


Charles Raskob Robinson is a Fellow of the Society. He paints at Brush Hill, a studio built in 1752, located in Washington, CT and formerly owned by Connecticut and New Mexico artist Eric Sloane. Some of Charlie's work may be seen on his website at: www.brushhillstudios.com.



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