

An Alpine History Mystery:

What Was Clarence Stearns Artistic Media?

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Clarence Stearns was born and raised in Zumbrota, MN, and it was in Zumbrota, at the age of 15 that he was introduced to a new artistic media that would transform his life and become his chosen vocation. Just two years later, he accepted a job working in a Zumbrota studio, which he soon purchased. But in 1898, Clarence, a drummer boy with his National Guard Unit, was sent off to join the war effort in the Spanish-American War. Well, that didn't last long – the war was over in less than four months. After the war, Clarence returned to continue developing his artistic talents, but he also cherished the advice of his father *"It is wonderful to consider life as an adventure, to wake each morning to a new adventure."*



So in pursuit of adventure, he travelled to Yellowstone National Park, where he could both enjoy the beautiful scenery and employ his artistic skills to capture the scenery in media. But it was here that he met a New York inventor named George Eastman who appreciated Stearns' talent right from the start and offered Clarence a position with his company. Well, the position would involve travel and an opportunity to increase and improve his artistic skills, so naturally Stearns accepted. He worked for Eastman for nine years then returned to Minnesota, this time to open a new studio in Rochester. In 1913, his studio was described in the Minneapolis Tribune this way:

"You climb a flight of stairs of a modest little Rochester building to find him. You have to hunt to find the building in the first place. But you discover a studio which rivals those of much larger cities... The studio itself is a work of art, a charming example of modern architectural skill plus good taste..."

From this studio Clarence became well-known and much in demand for his talents and he was often commissioned to do portraits of many famous personalities, including President Calvin Coolidge and First Lady Grace Coolidge, champion boxer Jack Dempsey, Notre Dame Head Coach Knute Rockne, dancer Ruth St. Dennis, evangelist Billy Sunday, pianist Dame Myra Hess, and many others.

In 1938 Clarence sold his studio and moved back to Zumbrota where he and his wife Inez built their first retirement home. But in 1953, at age 76, Clarence still had the adventurous spirit so the he and Inez moved to Alpine, CA to build a new retirement home on a street intersecting Anderson Road. And the name for that intersecting street? Well, Clarence got permission to rename it Zumbrota Road, of course.

Now, you might be wondering what artistic media Clarence mastered to become such a respected and sought after artist. Well that is our history mystery question this month.