

The Story behind Po-tse (Water Eagle)



"Finally our high school Library Media Center is complete" is the feeling of Melissa Belevender, Media Specialist at Sault Area High School, upon the re-hanging of the painting "Po-tse or Water Eagle" on the first floor. We had to wait until things were complete here to be able to hang the painting in a secure manner for all to see when using the library facility.

"Our painting has an interesting history" Mrs. Belevender notes. In 1918 Governor Chase Osborn convinced Charles L. Freer, a Detroit millionaire businessman and art patron, to donate the painting to the City of Sault Ste. Marie with the intention of establishing a gallery of fine art for the people of the Sault. The record is unclear whether the City "gave" or "loaned" the painting to the Sault Area Public Schools. What is known is that since 1920 the painting has been in the care and possession of the school district, and has been on display in various Sault Schools' buildings. During the early 1990's the painting was on loan to the Kewadin Casino's Bawating Gallery until the renovation of the High School Library. "At that time we were incorporating a collection of Native American materials into the library and building the Joyce McCoy and Blanche Belanger room to showcase this collection. Members of the Title IX Indian Education Parent Committee were supportive of bringing that painting back to the High School as a focal point for our library."

The painting's artist, Gerald Cassidy (1879-1934) resided and worked in Santa Fe New Mexico in the early 1900's and was commissioned by the U.S. and French governments to do major public art projects. His work is collected by eight museums across America including the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis, Indiana. The subject of the painting "Po-tse" or "Water Eagle" was a well know Native American in Taos, New Mexico at the time the painting was created who is shown standing near a cliff with hieroglyphics carved by his ancestors. "We are delighted to be able to share this work with our students and the community who use this Library facility regularly." Stop by and see the painting and ask Mrs. Belevender to share all the history she knows of it.

Melissa Belevender
March 4, 2005

February 7, 2011

A regular **meeting of the City Commission** was held in the Commission Room of the City-County building, 325 Court Street, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan on Monday, February 7, 2011 at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Bosbous

Present: Mayor Bosbous, Commissioner Bauer, Burton, Gerrie, Lynn, Munsell and Stefanski Absent: None Also Present: City Manager Nebel, City Attorney Cannello, City Clerk Robin R. Troyer, and various department heads

**REPORT ON THE GERALD CASSIDY PAINTING OF
PO'TSE (WATER EAGLE, TOAS INDIAN)**

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At the January 17th City Commission meeting, Commissioner Burton had inquired about the status of the Gerald Cassidy painting that is on loan to the Sault Schools. The City Commission entered into a formal agreement with the Sault Area Schools to continue displaying Po'tse (Water Eagle, Toas Indian) painted by Gerald Ira Cassidy. The City did have an appraisal done at that time (2002) for insurance purposes for this painting. The painting was valued at \$150,000 for insurance purposes. There was some suggestion that the City may want to consider selling this painting and placing the proceeds with the Osborn Trust. In reviewing the auction prices, the highest price paid for a Cassidy painting at auction was \$156,500 in 1999 for an oil on canvas painting. The most recent painting listed being sold by Cassidy was for \$39,200 in 2007. City Manager Nebel did check out prices for Thomas Moran paintings, and the top Thomas Moran painting sold for \$17,737,000. Of the top 10 paintings sold, the lowest sale price was \$1,120,000 in 2006. City Manager Nebel thinks at this time, the City's best interest is to continue displaying the painting at the Schools. If the value of Cassidy's paintings increase substantially in coming years, the City could consider the sale of that painting.

The Evening News
By Scott Brand
Feb. 11, 2011

Po-Tse painting, by Gerald Cassidy

Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. -- City officials seem inclined to retain ownership of a valuable painting depicting a Taos Indian, Po-Tse, after a presentation from City Manager Spencer Nebel regarding the status of the Gerald Cassidy piece.

Po-Tse was given to the people of Sault Ste. Marie in 1918, a gift from Charles Land Freer — a wealthy industrialist who made his money from the manufacture and sale of train cars — apparently prompted by Chase Osborn.

The city had held a number of paintings for decades only to find an extremely valuable work by Thomas Moran, which sold in a Nov. 2000 auction for \$950,000.

The auction proceeds have been used to establish the Osborn Trust which utilizes the interest from the original lump sum to fund various historical projects within the City of Sault Ste. Marie.

Po-Tse, also known as Water Eagle, was found once the city began inventorying its art collection on the heels of the discovery and subsequent sale of the Moran painting.

While it was not nearly as valuable as the Moran work, Cassidy's paintings have sold for anywhere between \$39,000 and \$156,500 in recent years.

At the time of the discovery, the city decided to retain the painting — apparently hoping that it would increase in value.

It is currently housed at the Sault Area High School Library with a \$150,000 insurance policy.\

Nebel indicated he was inclined to continue the arrangement with the Sault Schools and to consider selling the piece if its value substantially increases in the future.

The commission seemingly agreed with that assessment, bringing an end to any discussion regarding Po-Tse's future.

Artist- Gerald “Ira Diamond” Cassidy (1879-1934) was born in Covington Kentucky and resided in Cincinnati Ohio. He studied art at the Cincinnati Art Academy, the Art Students League and the National Academy of Design in New York. Health problems forced Cassidy to New Mexico, where he became interested in the Southwest, eventually settling in Santa Fe (1912). He was known early on for his postcards in art-nouveau style. He created award-winning murals in the Indian Arts Building of the Panama-California International Exposition, San Diego, California. Cassidy was a member of the Taos Society of Artists, and was commissioned by the French Government in 1926. Cassidy died of lead poisoning in 1934 while under commission for the Federal Building in Santa Fe. His wife was Ina Sizer Davis; sculptor, writer and promoter of Native American issues. His work can be seen in museums across the country.

Benefactor- Charles Freer (1856-1919) was born in Kingston, New York and resided in Detroit, Michigan. He was a wealthy Industrialist who made his money from the manufacture and sale of train cars. Freer’s real interest was in art. When he retired he spent his fortune traveling the world collecting art, with a special focus on Asian art. Upon Freer’s death in 1919 he bequeathed his collection of Asian art to the Smithsonian Institute along with money for a separate building to house the collection. Just a year before his death he so generously gave the painting “Po-tse”, to the people of Sault Ste. Marie.

Correspondence between Governor Osborn and Charles Freer from 1918

March 27, 1918

Dear Mr. Freer:

You will be interested in measuring the radiation of your influence by the enclosed newspaper cuttings.

We are trying to get together the first collection of art for the public undertaken in the North Country. Maybe some time you will be able to tell some of your friends something to help out. We would really rather have your interests, much rather, than anything you personally possess, because if we have your interest we will get a lot of other things.

All of Michigan and the country are indebted to you for your profound cultural influence.

Yours very sincerely,

Mr. Charles L. Freer,
Union Trust Building
Detroit, Mich.

#33 Ferry Avenue, Easts,
Detroit, Michigan,
April 4th, 1918

Hon. Chase S. Osborn,
Sault De Sainte Marie, Michigan.

Dear Mr. Osborn:-

Accept my appreciative thanks for your kind letter of March 27th and for the interesting clippings from your local press.

"I am delighted to learn of the interest in American Art being publicly expressed in Northern Michigan—such beginnings in war time argue well for future American civilization. The inclusion at the birth of the collection, of specimens of Western scenery by home-bred artists is profoundly significant, and I would like to join in the christening by presenting a painting in oil, the canvas of which measures about sixty by twenty-eight inches, framed in gilded wood and done by Gerald Cassidy, an American artist who is devoting himself to motifs of the great West, and who did interesting mural decorations for the main art gallery at the San Diego Exposition; and I am told for other public places, as well. He is represented in a few private collections but has not yet attained broad recognition.

His painting referred to above is a life-sized portrait of a well-known Indian now living at Toas, New Mexico, named Po'tse (Water Eagle), who stands in a narrow canyon dressed in rich Indian robes. The face of the great cliff immediately behind him shows some incised hieroglyphs carved by his early forefathers who have passed on, and at his feet the remains of a ruined jar decorated with primitive Aztec designs, peacefully rests."

It is not a great work of art, but one I believe capable of awakening certain important inspirations, and if your Association will give it a place where the public can have free access, I will gladly contribute it as a mite toward the good work which I wish every success.

Very sincerely yours,
Charles I. Freer