

### **RAGGEDY ANN'S UNCLE**

Albert Simonson is an ardent historian. He has traced the history of local pioneers and has provided a wealth of information to the Alpine Historical Society. Albert and his wife Bonnie now live in Santa Ysabel and he continues to be one of our most important resources—he makes history come alive. The following article by Albert introduces us to one of Alpine's famous residents – Justin Gruelle.

“What do Alpine's Historical Museum and its Catholic church have in common with Washington's Smithsonian Institution? Answer – paintings by local artist Justin Gruelle.

Gruelle, already a famous artist when he came to Alpine in 1957, bought a place at the crook in the road on Lilac Lane. His brother, Johnny, was the creator of the enormously popular Raggedy Ann rag doll with shoe-button eyes and red hair. Both brothers wrote and illustrated the Raggedy Ann and Andy books. When Johnny died, Justin finished the book they were working on and then let the rag doll characters slip into fond immortality.

Justin's large mural of pioneer aviators was hung near the left wing of Lindbergh's “Spirit of Saint Louis” at the Smithsonian.

When the Alpine Historical Society acquired the pioneer home of Captain Beaty, they found an artist's desk and also a metal sign, “J.C. Gruelle Studio.” The sign is believed to have hung on Gruelle's fence at Lilac Lane.

For the Queen of Angels church in Alpine, he painted 14 Stations of the Cross. He did portraits of well-known figures such as Admiral Fleet, Charles Lindbergh and the Wright Brothers.”

Justin Gruelle was born on July 1, 1889, the youngest son of R. B. Gruelle, who was one of the “famous four” original Hoosier artists. He would emulate his father's fine art style by working in watercolors and oils. Justin became a masterful portrait artist as well as a landscape artist. He was commissioned by the Works Progress Administration to do murals, eight of which are in the Collection of WPA murals in Norwalk, Connecticut.

Murals by Justin Gruelle have been on display in the Smithsonian and in museums from Norwalk, Connecticut to San Diego. In 1970, his mural “Early Birds” was hung in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution's Art Wing in Washington, D.C. This mural traces the history of aviation.

Justin and his wife Mabel came to Alpine and purchased a home on Lilac Lane off of Alpine Heights Road. A visit to his studio convinced the visitor that here was an artist of real stature and amazing versatility. His works range through illustration, huge murals for public buildings and institutions, advertising and publicity art, landscapes and portraits in oils and watercolors. He wrote and illustrated a very popular book for children, “A Mother Goose Parade.”

If you haven't seen examples of Justin's work, stop by the museum soon. His original sign and some examples of his artwork are on display. While you are there, take a moment to peruse the new displays in Dr. Nichols' carriage house—behind the Dr. Sophronia Nichols house. Bill Waterworth and Carol Morrison have done an excellent job fixing up the space and turning it into a terrific extension of the museum. The museums are open the last Saturday and Sunday of each month from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. and private tours can be arranged by calling Carol Morrison at 619-445-2544. Alpine history is rich and it's definitely worth the trip.

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Justin Gruelle's Early Birds Mural



Raggedy Ann and Andy