

Highlands Radio Program
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by Odean Lee Hill

THE HIGHLANDS OF LOS ANGELES

William Lees Judson

The Highlands of northeast Los Angeles became the home of Occidental College in 1898 and the birthplace of Los Angeles Pacific College in 1903. Few people know that the University of Southern California's college of fine arts and architecture was located for many years on the banks of the Arroyo Seco in Garvanza. This fact is revealed in the study of another of the Highlands' famous characters.

William Lees Judson was born in England, arrived in America at the age of 10, attended public school in Brooklyn, N. Y., and served 4 years with the Illinois volunteers in the Civil War. He studied art in New York and Paris during the seventies. Mr. Judson settled in London, Can., where for 17 years he limited his art to portrait painting and teaching. Two years before the Chicago World's Fair he moved to that city to take advantage of the opportunities which he anticipated such an event would afford all fields of art. Working day and night his health broke and the doctor ordered him to a milder climate. Mr. Judson had purchased a ticket to Florida, when by chance he met at the depot George Wharton James, noted author and lecturer of the southwest. The latter was so enthusiastic in his praise of California that Mr. Judson exchanged his Florida ticket for one to Los Angeles. He arrived here broken in health and penniless where there was no market and little desire for art. Two days later, in December 1893, the eyes of the artist first saw the beautiful Arroyo Seco. It was love at first sight. The Highlands became his home for the rest of his life.

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The beauty of California mountains, foothills, valley, arroyos, sea and desert stirred Mr. Judson's artistic emotions so profoundly that he turned from portraits to landscape painting. Soon he organized and became the first dean of the College of Fine Arts on the campus of U. S. C. In 1901 he moved the young, but growing college to his new home on the bank of the Arroyo Seco in the Highlands. On Dec. 9, 1910, fire destroyed the college building and Mr. Judson's art works of a lifetime. Escaping by a window he met his classes that day under the spreading pepper trees. Lumber for rebuilding was on the ground beside the smoking ruins before night.

The school attracted many artists and brought fame to the Highlands. It remained in this community for nearly 2 decades until it was moved back to the University campus. The old master took up his private painting. In 1913 George Wharton James wrote of Professor Judson: "He is still vigorous and active as ever. Years seem to have little power over him. He will doubtless paint until the Master Artist calls and thus leave behind him not only a large number of exquisite pictures, but the memory of an active, busy, useful, joy-giving life." A decade later another said of Dr. Judson, "The crowning years of this pioneer of California art are being spent in the Highlands. Here on the banks of his beloved Arroyo the old master still finds inspiration that fired his genius to noble achievement 30 years ago." Recently I received the following words from A. C. Weatherhead, now Dean of the College of Architecture and Fine Arts at U. S. C., "The painting done by Mr. Judson

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represented a comparatively high standard of excellence in accordance with a school of his time. Of course, this was very different from the way in which the best painters of today work. He must be considered as essentially a pioneer in the field. I think one of his outstanding qualities was that evinced by his determination to do a fine service for art education at a time which presented many great discouragements."

Two years before the venerable artist died in 1928, his sons established "The William Lees Judson Memorial Gallery," housed in the old Fine Arts Building at 200 S. Ave. 66. This historic site is now the home of the Judson studios where a second and third generation design and work in stain and leaded glass. The public is most cordially invited to visit the memorial gallery, where nearly 40 of their grandsire's paintings are on free exhibition.