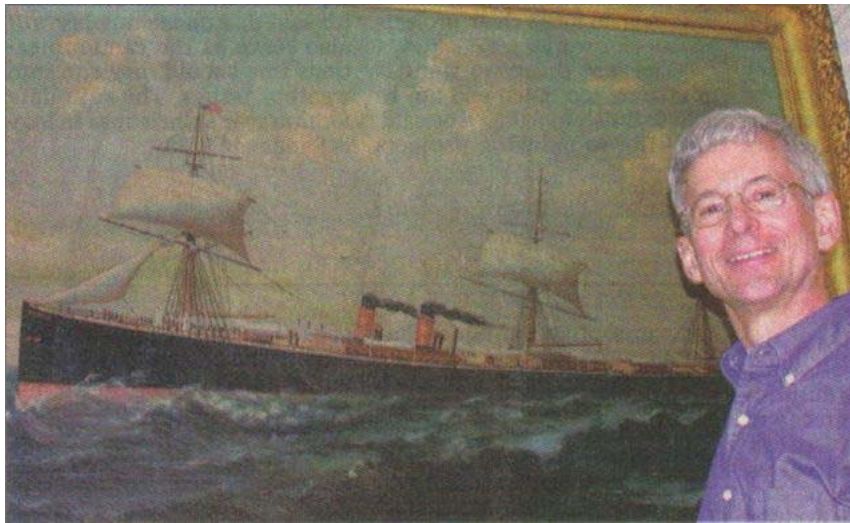


The Chaska Herald Newspaper called Daryl Bren after the newspaper had received a letter in the mail from Liven Peterson of Everett, Washington. The letter stated that he owned an authentic Torgerson painting and wanted to contact Daryl Bren. An information sheet and interview was given to the Chaska Herald followed by a photo session in the Lodge in front of the painting. At the beginning of the interview, the letter was presented to Daryl Bren. The following article appeared on the front and second page of the Chaska Herald Newspaper on May 17, 2007.

Painting launches quest

Local man pieces together artist's works and life



Daryl Bren standing with the painting that ignited years of research, “Servia,” by William Torgerson.

It was a simple question by a fellow mason that led Daryl Bren on a road to discovery. One day, years ago, at Minnesota River Valley Masonic Lodge No. 6 in Shakopee, a man asked Bren about a large oil painting hanging in the main chambers.

Bren wasn't familiar with the painting or the artist, but having minored in art history in college, it was a challenge the Chaska retiree was willing to take on.

It didn't take Bren too long to answer his mason's question. The painting, a ship called the “Servia”, was by William Torgerson, a Swedish-born painter who worked primarily in the late 19th century.

It fit well with the masons' mantra of improving one's self and then going out and improving the world, said Bren.

But despite having answered his fellow mason's question, Bren didn't stop there. Researching the painter stirred something in him- a desire to learn more about the obscure painter. Today, Bren is working on the most comprehensive listing todate of Torgerson's works.

Piecemeal

For the last several years, Bren has been working dutifully to put together the pieces of Torgerson's life. He has used census reports, historical archives, naturalization records, passenger manifests and hand written letters to possible descendants to glean more information about the elusive artist.

“In terms of his daily life, it’s grey,” said Bren. “I’ve found far more out about his father-in-law than him.”

“I suspect that the lack of documentation about his private life indicates that, excluding his art work, he was not a visible person above the crowds.”

What Bren does know is that Torgerson arrived in the United States before the great immigration wave. He was a cigar maker initially, but the Great Chicago Fire destroyed his home and his factory. Shortly after, he began painting the ships that supplied Chicago’s rebuilding effort, Bren said.

Torgerson studied under Julius Sloan of the Hudson River School of painters. Though his early works show some diversity - a pair of skiers on a mountain, the Chicago River and Niagara Falls, much of Torgerson’s work was commissioned by shipping companies, like the White Star and Cunard Lines.

The *Servia* was one such example. The Cunard Line commissioned Torgerson to paint the ship, which was the first ever to have electric lights and the first ever to have a steel hull, Bren said.

Torgerson also painted a number of scenes depicting water-borne battles during the Civil War. Water Bren says, was what distinguished Torgerson’s work.

“The way it flowed,” he said. It was very live, very animated.”

New Lead

As Bren continues to search for more information about Torgerson, he is patient.

“It’s not something you get the answer right now,” he said. “You go back and look at things many times.”

Bren said his eyes and hand tire from going through the sheet of microfilm. Much of the information he collects, he can do little more than set aside and wait for the missing pieces to fill in.

But there are moments of great reward as well.

“I always get excited when I find a new (painting),” he said with a smile.

Today, Bren gets his first look at a letter from a couple in Washington who believe they have an authentic Torgerson work and are looking for Bren’s help to confirm.

“Peterson,” he says, reading the address label. The synapses quickly fire as Bren runs through Torgerson’s relatives in his mind, recalling that Torgerson was related to some Petersons in Washington.

“Maybe it’s a relative,” he says giddily.

Bren has no idea how many paintings Torgerson did in his lifetime. He has found them scattered among museums, naval centers and universities. So far, he has amassed a list of 37. That bests the Smithsonian which lists only four, Bren said.

Most of the paintings he has found range in value from \$500 up to \$22,000.

“The quality of his paintings are very well rendered,” said Bren.

When Bren completes his catalogue of Torgerson’s works, he plans to submit them, along with some biographical information, to the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s Web site. Until that time, he continues to collect more information in the hopes of someday connecting all of the dots.

Can you help fill in the pieces of William Torgerson’s life?

Post your information at www.chaskaherald.com