

# Airport art provides travelers happy surprise

**S**outhwest art scenes at El Paso International Airport never fail to provide travelers with a happy surprise.

They are on the main floor, clearly visible from the top of the escalator.

Maureen Graves, one of "Las Amigas" volunteer women who provide information to travelers at the foot of the escalator, said many travelers ask about the pictures.

"THE SIZE of the pictures (10 feet by 20 feet on both sides of the entrance and 10 feet by 10 feet in the center) is mind boggling," she said. "The people are fascinated to see such typical Southwestern scenes. They often stand on the upper level to take pictures."

Las Amigas, a part of the Woman's Department of the Chamber of Commerce, is ready with information about the pictures:

They were commissioned in 1919 for the banking room of the First National Bank of El Paso by James G. McNary, president and Joshua Reynolds, bank founder. Edward Holslag of De Kalb, Ill., was commissioned to do 10 murals for the bank. They were done on canvas glued to the walls, varying in sizes from 10 feet by 10 feet to 10 feet by 20 feet, and framed.

HOLSLAG HAD other paintings hanging in the Palmer House in Chicago and the Library of Congress. The murals were completed in 1920 and hung in the bank until 1931 when the bank closed its doors and went into receivership.

The 10 murals were bought by Lee



Virginia  
Turner

H. Orndorff Sr., an executor of the bank. The paintings and frames were removed and donated to the College of Mines (now UT El Paso).

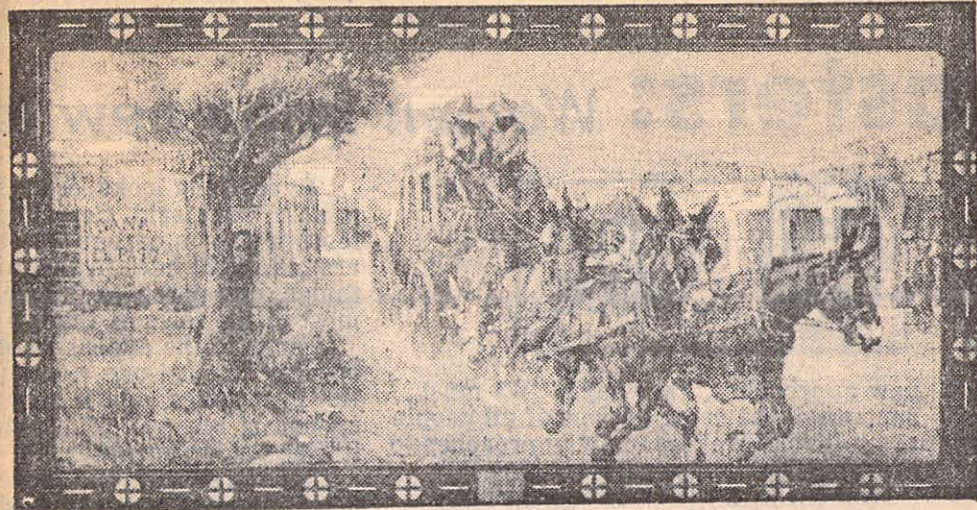
One of them, "The Buffalo" was the only one displayed and was hung for a time in the Student Union Building. The rest were stored in the attic of the Centennial Museum.

THE COLLEGE later loaned three paintings to the airport, where they were displayed. The airport was remodeled and in 1970, Woody Crumbo, curator of art at El Paso Museum of Art, cleaned and restored the three paintings for the new building.

Mrs. Charles (Rosanne) Orndorff, an artist and art teacher, became interested in Crumbo's work. Her husband is the grandson of Lee Orndorff Sr.

Inasmuch as the college had stored the paintings, a request was made to return them to the Orndorff heirs if the college had no plans for them. Mrs. Orndorff picked them up.

"All but one had been incorrectly rolled," she recalled. "There were two missing — no one seems to know what happened to them. I put them in the yard to warm up and spent a month unrolling them. I restored the Ysleta Mission painting.



Herald-Post photo by Jerry Littman

'In the Beginning' painting fascinates travelers coming to the airport.

"THE PAINTINGS are so large, there is no place to hang them, so I stopped working on them."

The five paintings that were returned to the Orndorffs are in the possession of Will Orndorff, Lee Orndorff Sr.'s son, who lives in Socorro, N.M. He said he has the paintings in storage in El Paso.

"I have no immediate plans for them," he said. "The problem is they are so large there is no place to hang them."

Charles Orndorff said his father Lee Orndorff Jr., was killed when Charles was 5. Lee Orndorff Sr., his grandfather, was also the father of a daughter, Virginia, who lives in India.

THE THREE on display at the airport are "The Pioneer", "The Roundup," and "In the Beginning."

"The first time I had ever seen the paintings was when Crumbo had

them down and was working on them," Mrs. Orndorff said. "He told me about the others at the college."

"I got in touch with the artist's nephew, a newspaper editor in Illinois, and he told me about the artist's other paintings. My prime concern is that a piece of history should be saved."

"I OPENED AN art store, 'Art Spot' in Northeast El Paso and had a studio there. I sold it in 1979, but I've been teaching in the studio for the past 16 years. I still do some restoration work but I don't paint much."

Information on the paintings was compiled by Mrs. Charles Orndorff and from 1921 financial statements of the First National Bank.

Virginia Turner is a columnist for the El Paso Herald-Post. 6-10-88