

# ***Rocky Mountain Printmaker: Estes Park Artist Dean Babcock***



**Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery  
Lindsborg, Kansas**

**August 5 through October 22, 2017**

Untitled [Rocky Mountains in Winter], 1912, Watercolor on paper. 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches. Collection Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art, Denver, CO



*Battle Mountain*, 1911, oil on canvas, 26 x 22 inches. Dusty and Kathy Loo Historical Colorado Collection

The artist Dean Babcock was a rare Renaissance man, a creative soul who could do it all – intellectual pursuits of art, music, classical languages, mathematics, philosophy, and essay writing, as well as physically demanding ones such as mountaineering and trail-blazing, home construction, and all facets of mechanical engineering and metalsmithing. The same hands could carve delicate lines from a block of cherry wood to create Japanese-inspired landscapes, excavate new pathways from timberline boulder fields on mountainsides, and then write essays on the birds and wildflowers seen along the way. This exhibition presents a retrospective of Babcock's career as an artist and aims to encourage a wider appreciation for the artist's life and work.

## **Early Years**

Born in Canton, Illinois, on January 14, 1888, Dean Babcock was the only child of a banking man, William Babcock and the former Josephine McCall. The national census of 1900 places 12-year-old Dean, along with his mother and father, at the home of his uncle Charles Levings on Yale Avenue in Chicago. Young Babcock was known as musical prodigy, playing the violin and heading up a mandolin ensemble in Chicago.<sup>1</sup> In 1903 when he was 15, Babcock made his first visit to Estes Park, Colorado, spending a month in the summer at the Long's Peak Inn. His first, life-changing climb up nearby Long's Peak was guided by naturalist

Enos Mills (1870-1922), who also ran the Long's Peak Inn with his brother, Enoch Josiah "Joe" Mills





XV [aka Jays], woodcut on paper; edition No. 84. 4 ½ x 5 ½ inches. The Wilson Family Collection

(1878-1935). Babcock fell in love with the Rocky Mountains, eventually becoming a serious mountain climber, explorer, map maker, trail builder, along with being quite an artist.

At 14,259 feet in elevation, Long's Peak is one of many "fourteeners" in Colorado and is located a bit southwest of the town of Estes Park. The peak is the highest point in the Rocky Mountain National Park, and was named in honor of the explorer Major Stephen Long (1784-1864) whose expedition traversed the area in 1820. Estes Park is named after Missouri native Joel Estes, who founded the community in 1859. The town had evolved into a tourist destination by the early 1870s, and the major lines of the Denver, Utah, and Pacific Railroads were all in place by 1881.

The Levings family kept a home in Estes Park, called "Graystone," and brought their two sons for summer vacations along with their Babcock relations. But, tragedy struck the summer of 1905. When hiking Mt. Ypsilon in August, 21-year-old Louis Levings fell several hundred feet to his death when trying to get a photograph of the beautiful scenery. Dean Babcock had been with his cousin the first part of the day, climbing Mt. Fairchild together along with another friend, but had split off from the party before the second climb that day.<sup>2</sup> The rescue party, including

Babcock, ended by burying the body on site, marking with a cairn of timberline rocks. By 1929 the construction had disintegrated, so the family had Babcock lead others in carrying a galvanized iron casket to transfer the skeletal remains and replace under the rocks, and install a new bronze gravesite marker. The Levings family remained tied to the area, returning for extended summer visits for many years.

### Estes Park, Colorado

During the summer of 1908, Dean and his mother Josie purchased their own land overlooking Long's Peak, 80 acres north of Enos Mill's Long's Peak Inn. The next summer, in 1909, Dean built a fireplace and studio shop for the cabin, and they christened the house "The Ledges." Dean's father, William Babcock, seems to have been often absent from the family, maintaining a legal residence on Nassau Street in New York City from around 1890. There William was president of a banking concern, American Fiscal Corporation, and had mining business that often took him to Goldfield, Nevada. William's presence was unusual enough to be noted in the Estes Park newspaper in August of 1912: "William Babcock is visiting his family at the Ledges" and that his in-laws, the Charles Levings, entertained the family at Graystone.<sup>3</sup> Dean Babcock seems to have traveled back and forth between Estes Park and Illinois in those first years of land ownership. The 1910 census reveals the 22-year-old and his



XXVI [aka Summer Clouds], color woodcut on paper; No. 28, 6 x 9 inches. The Wilson Family Collection

58-year-old mother living in Canton, with Josie's sisters Margaret Entwistle (63) and Carrie Black (61). William Babcock was listed as working in a city bank and Dean's occupation as "artist." This would have been the time when Dean Babcock was a student in Chicago, studying engineering and at the Art Institute (AIC) with John Vanderpoel (1857-1911) and in New York City with Robert Henri (1865-1929). The year 1910 marks the point at which Dean Babcock is considered to have committed to Colorado as his official residence, staying his first winter at the Ledges 1910-11.

The first few years living in Estes Park Babcock was known primarily as a painter, creating oils and watercolors of beautiful snowy landscapes of mountains and trees of the Front Range, such as *Battle Mountain* of 1911 and the untitled scene of the Rocky Mountains in winter, both in this exhibition. It was 1911 when Babcock and botanist William Skinner Cooper (1884-1978), surveyed and drew the first "Map of Longs Peak and Vicinity, Colorado" which was privately printed and sold around the region. Babcock and photographer Fred Clatworthy (1875-1953) made another map of Estes Park and the surrounding Elkanah Valley (aka the Tahosa Valley) in 1915.

Enos Mills had long been an outspoken proponent of turning 1,000 acres of mountain land over to government protection as a national park, to ensure the land be preserved in all its natural beauty. Mills lectured around the country, presenting new audiences with splendors of

the Rocky Mountains--dramatic alpine peaks along with delicate wildflowers and fascinating mammalian inhabitants. He visited Washington D.C. legislators to advocate for national park designation, but back at home in Estes Park, the plan took much longer to be popularly embraced. In the May 12, 1911, edition of *The Middle Park Times*, Dean Babcock, his uncle Charles Levings, and close friend Charles Edwin Hewes (1870-1947) were among the signatories of a public statement by voters opposed to the whole idea:

Whereas, It has been proposed that the Allens Park and Long's Peak districts be included in a national park and, Whereas, The residents and property owners of the above named districts can see no benefit nor advantage to result from parking said districts; therefore, be it Resolved, That representatives of said residents and property owners hereby protest against the including of the said districts in the proposed national park, and further be it Resolved, That copies of this resolution be sent to representatives, senators and the public press and be published, and further be it. Resolved, That more definite reasons for this protest be set forth at a future time.<sup>4</sup>

The residents and landowners eventually came around to the idea of having a preserved wilderness, but in the end, only 415 square miles were designated as the Rocky Mountain National Park on January 26, 1915. The park encompasses the Continental Divide, mountain ranges, forests, and alpine tundra environments.

### Artist Helen Hyde

In June of 1912, Estes Park began producing its own seasonal newspaper, *The Estes Park Trail*, catering to the summer tourists and campers. The paper carried advertisements for all the local hotels and noted guests and their visitors by name. The newspaper was a weekly edition, published June through the end of September until 1921 when it developed into a year-round publication. In the third issue's social column, for June 29, 1912, it was announced that the Gillettes of Chicago were staying at the Columbine Hotel and had with them a guest, "Helen Hyde of Tokio, Japan, the celebrated artist."<sup>5</sup> The same issue noted that the Charles Levings were back in town at Graystone, and had entertained members of the Elkanah Club with a very enjoyable dinner. The *Trail* went on to



Helen Hyde, *Moonlight on the Viga Canal*, 1912, color woodcut on paper, 12 x 14 inches. Collection of Barbara J. Thompson





Picture of the Distant View of the Sea from the Inn at Enoshima [Enoshima ryotei yori kaijō chōbō no zu], Left panel of triptych by Utagawa Hiroshige and Utagawa Kunisada: *Elegant Pastiche of Genji* [Fūryū mitate Genji], 1854, 12<sup>th</sup> month, color woodcut on paper; 13 ¼ x 9 ¼ in. Greenough Collection, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

explain the club “consists of most of the people of Elkanah Valley, and their friends. Its specialty is mountain climbing and nature study.”<sup>6</sup> Naturally, Dean Babcock was a prominent club member.

A few weeks later, Helen Hyde (1868-1919) and the Elkanah Club came together, for “an informal exhibition of the many rare paintings of Helen Hyde of Tokio which she produced last winter in

Old Mexico.”<sup>7</sup> It is very likely that she showed an impression of the color woodcut included in this exhibition, *Moonlight on the Viga Canal* of 1912. This print reveals Hyde’s inspiration from Japanese 19th-century printmakers Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), as well as her confident mastery in the technique, capturing subtle reflections and color effects. Before the presentation, Hyde gave a dinner party in honor of her hosts, the Gillelles, and inviting “the following residents of Elkanah Valley: Charles Levings and wife, Mrs. Josie Babcock and Messrs. Dean Babcock and Charles Edwin Hewes.”<sup>8</sup>

In his 1917 article, “The Wood-Cut Prints of Dean Babcock,” Theo Merrill Fisher explains the significance of the meetings between Helen Hyde and Babcock. At that point the young artist was recently out of art school but lacked direction and was uncertain of his direction to take. It was the “opportunity to discuss with Miss Hyde the history and the methods of the Japanese printmakers and her own work in the field, [which] gave Babcock at once the inspiration and essential technical knowledge needed for initial effort along similar lines.”<sup>9</sup> Babcock approached the

new medium as self-discovery challenge, doing every step of drawing on and carving the multiple blocks needed for color registration, and then learning the secrets of printing each block with transparent inks in perfectly crisp registration.

### Making Prints

In this exhibition are multiple impressions of several of Babcock’s woodblock prints. The Wilson Family has loaned the color woodcut *Estes Cone in Winter* accompanied by two unsigned proofs printed from the same carved blocks of wood. Each impression is unique, with varying intensities of color and shading. There are two impressions of untitled Roman numeral X, of flying birds near a cliff face, which show Babcock experimented with his designs—in this case making one cliff blue and in the other print, purple. Many of the prints in this exhibition carry Roman numeral designations that appear to begin with *Estes Cone in Winter* as the first in this chronological system. Most also carry an edition number, which indicates the order of printing. For this impression of *Estes Cone in Winter*, “No. 2” was the second print in the edition completed by



X, Color woodcut on paper; edition No. 58, 6 7/8 x 4 7/8 inches. Collection Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art, Denver, CO



N.S. I [aka Estes Cone in Winter], ca.1912, color woodcut on paper; edition No. 2, 5 x 7 inches. The Wilson Family Collection

the artist. In the color woodblock XX, Babcock's design is a gemlike view of Mt. Russell, a "fourteener" in the Sierra Nevada mountain range in California. There are three impressions of the print in this exhibition from different collections—numbers 184, 196, and 200—all demonstrating a range of paper and ink color differences.

The year 1914 brought interesting changes to Dean Babcock's life. He exhibited prints in Chicago at the Art Institute, and illustrated his friend Charles Edwin Hewes's book of poetry, *Songs of the Rockies*. Babcock's delicate line drawings done in the Japanese manner grace the cover and many pages throughout the book, a copy of which is included in this exhibition. A second edition of the book was published in 1922, and was widely advertised in newspapers across the country during the spring and summer of 1923. Near the end of 1914, on November 14, Dean Babcock married Adele Asenath Ramsey (1891-1966) in a Catholic ceremony at the

Ramsey family's Meadow Ranch in Greeley, Colorado. Adele had been working as a principal of a public school, and was known to be a creative, musical person, herself.

In 1915 Babcock exhibited his woodcut, *The First Snow*, in the fourth annual California Society of Etchers (later the California Society of Printmakers) while Helen Hyde exhibited *The Bamboo Gate*. It is likely that the untitled print commonly known as "Snow Fall" in the Kirkland Museum's collection that appears in this exhibition is an impression of *The First Snow*. Robert Harshe (1879-1938), first president of the

society established in 1913 (and future president of the AIC from 1921-38), noted in a 1916 essay that Helen Hyde and Dean Babcock were among

the first printmakers who had immediately affiliated and showed with the society as soon as it was open to non-Californian artists.<sup>10</sup> 1916 brought more opportunities to exhibit prints. In February, New Mexico printmaker Gustave Baumann (1881-1971) organized a print exhibition at the AIC, "American Block Prints and Wood Engravings," including his own work among a selection of other American printmakers such as Helen Hyde and Dean Babcock, who submitted eight prints. His *Estes Cone in Winter*, *The Japanese Tree*, and *Medieval Mountain* were among them. In May, a *New York Times* review mentioned Babcock's prints on display the Madison Avenue gallery Berlin Photographic Company. The review approved of wood engraving and block printing's gaining popular favor, and oftentimes being influenced by the art of



XX [view of Mt. Russell], color woodcut on paper; edition No. 200, 4 x 2 inches. Collection Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art, Denver, CO





Untitled [aka Snow Fall or *The First Snow*], woodcut on paper; edition No. 51, 4 x 2 5/8 inches. Collection Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art, Denver, CO

Japan. Dean Babcock's prints were praised as "faintly tinted, delicate and charming."<sup>11</sup>

In October in Kansas, the annual McPherson High School exhibition (established 1911) was held, with invited artists including Taos Society members, Dean Babcock, Oscar Brousse Jacobson (1882-1966), and a room dedicated to the work of Birger Sandzén (1871-1954). The exhibition was held earlier than usual, as many of the pieces were grouped in a special section "Paintings by Some Artists Working in the Southwest." These were scheduled to travel to Topeka and Wichita in Kansas, the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Springfield in Illinois, and then to Indiana's Herron Institute of Art in Indianapolis. Babcock submitted two paintings, *Mountain Spring* and *Estes*

*Cone*, which were both sent on tour, and for the graphic arts section, submitted *The Japanese Tree*, of a scene near Estes Park, Colorado, with Long's Peak visible in background.

### World War I, Park Ranger and Civil Engineer

Working with the Department of the Interior, in January and February of 1917, the United States National Museum (now the National Gallery of Art) in Washington, D.C., hosted a special collection of national park views in a "First Exhibition of National Parks Paintings." Recognizing that a "distinct school of national scenery artists has grown up," a conference on national parks was undertaken and works by well-known artists were collected, including Thomas Moran (1837-1926) and his *Grand Canyon of the Colorado* (1904), Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) with his *Estes Park, Colorado*, *Whyte's Lake* (ca. 1877) and *Mount Whitney* (1877), and Birger Sandzén's works showing the Rocky Mountain National Park and the Grand Canyon.<sup>12</sup> Dean Babcock lent four paintings to the display, all of Rocky Mountain National Park subjects: *The Twin Sisters*, *A Glimpse of the Range*, *The Explorers*, and *The Crags*.

Although duly registered in 1917 for the draft in World War I, Babcock was ineligible for military service. Instead, he took the place of a forest ranger in the Rocky Mountain National Park and was assigned to park planning, directing the creation of a new Long's Peak trail. Reviews of his efforts conclude that, "Common sense, combined with his artist's sense in selecting natural viewpoints with dramatic effect, helped



*The Japanese Tree, V [aka Long's Peak]*, 1916, color woodcut on paper, 7 x 10 inches. Courtesy of McPherson, Kansas, School District



make Long's Peak trail one of the best for scenery in the West."<sup>13</sup> Further, his engineering background and familiarity "with the terrain and artist's sense of natural viewpoints helped to make the trail not only scenic, but with grade and undulations which kept melting snow and rain water from eroding the trail."<sup>14</sup> Babcock was officially a park ranger through September of 1920, but was always ready for a brisk hike up a mountainside, being on call for any expeditions that needed a guide.

With a group of students from the Ohio State University geology department, Colonel Edward Orton, Jr. had



*Medieval Mountain, VI*, ca. 1916, woodcut on paper; edition No. 31, 5 1/8 x 7 inches.  
Bethany College Collection, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery



*Wild Basin, Mt. Orton*, 1922, oil on canvas Orton Memorial Library of Geology Art Collection, Ohio State University





Untitled [Pueblo woman with pot], 1917, watercolor on paper, in hand-carved Babcock frame, 10 ¼ x 7 ¼ inches, frame 14 x 11 inches. Western History Collection, Denver Public Library, C88-25

investigated the glacial history of the Wild Basin area south of Long's Peak in 1908, guided by Dean Babcock. When the artist created the map of Estes Park and vicinity in 1911, he decided to label one of the unnamed peaks "Mt. Orton" after the geology professor.<sup>15</sup> That title was eventually approved by the federal Board of

Geographical names, and Col. Orton was notified in 1921. Orton was so pleased with the news, he got in touch with Babcock and commissioned the oil painting *Wild Basin, Mt. Orton* (1922) from the Colorado artist. The painting was exhibited at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts in 1923 and then installed in the Orton Memorial Library of Geology at Ohio State as the beginning of a library art collection.<sup>16</sup>

### Denver, the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression

During wartime and for the several years following, Babcock had been concentrating on park ranger work, not creating much art while in the great outdoors, but around 1920 he began working on printmaking again. In November of 1921, Theo Merrill Fisher published another article, this time in *The American Magazine of Art*, stating that Babcock aimed to bring attention to the glories of nature and "to do with tints and lines what Thoreau did with words—to present the more subtle truths of nature for their own sake, yet with emphasis on their relations to human life and thought."<sup>17</sup>

Babcock showed new pieces in April of 1921 with the Topeka Art Guild exhibition at Washburn College (now Washburn University) in Kansas, and in December, made some of his work available for purchase from C.A. Seward's (1884-1939) lithography studio in Wichita, Kansas.

The following year, Seward organized Wichita's first "Wood Block Prints in Color" in which Babcock was entered along with friends Gustave Baumann, Helen Hyde, and Birger Sandzén. It has been speculated that Babcock and Seward may have met when Seward visited the Sandzéns summering in Estes Park.<sup>18</sup> Although woodblock print exhibitions were organized annually in Wichita from 1928 through 1946, it does not appear Babcock participated in any of these later print shows.

In 1922, the Chappell House at 1300 Logan Street was given to the Denver Art Association to "provide a suitable place where artists may work and exhibit collectively." In the building there were twelve studios on the top floor, an extensive research library, and a gallery space on the ground floor. The next year, the Denver Art Association at Chappell House was officially established as the Denver Art Museum, which has been founded as an organization in 1893 and claimed office space in the Denver Public Library but had no true, physical home for a permanent



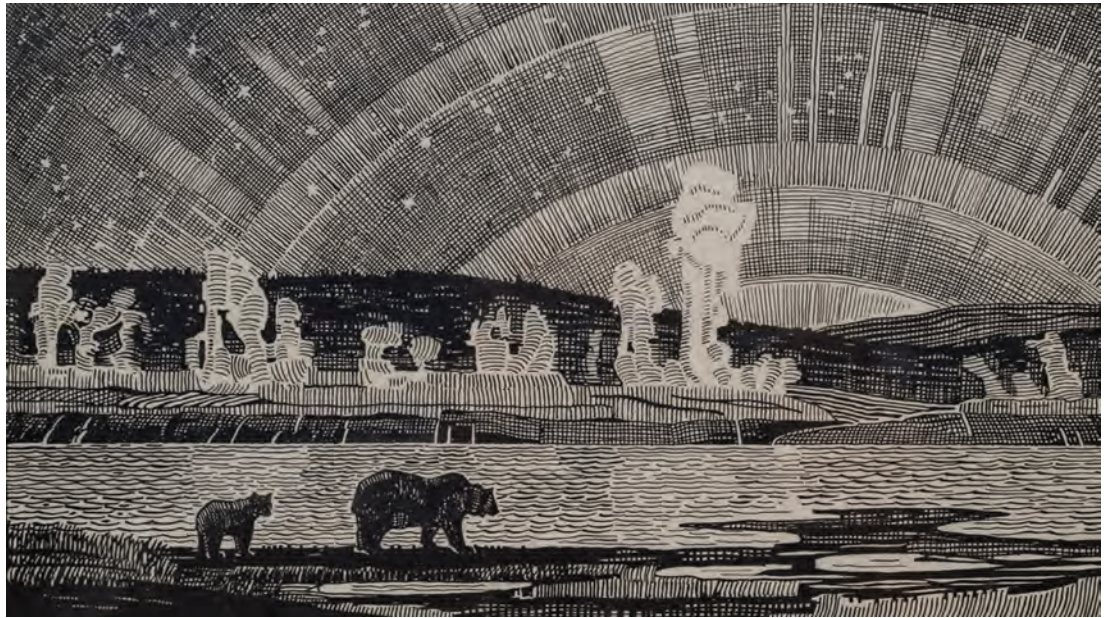
Untitled [aka *The Gorge*, or, *Ramparts in the Rockies*], ca.1933, woodcut on paper, 10 x 7 ½ inches. Collection Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art, Denver, CO



collection until this point in time in 1923.

*The Estes Park Trail* announced in February of 1924 that “Dean Babcock, who has gone to Denver for the remainder of the winter, will make his headquarters temporarily at Chappell House, the studio building owned by the Denver Art Museum.”<sup>19</sup> The artist had been creating most of his art works on commission, for particular persons and sites, and felt that practice would be easier to continue in a more populated, urban environment. Babcock planned to spend several months per year back in his Estes Park home, and did, but enjoyed exploring different opportunities for work in the art world while residing in Denver.

Babcock served as a jury member for the 1928 Denver Art Museum “Thirty-fourth Annual Exhibition of Fine Arts” and showed an oil painting, *Wilderness*. That same year, he and 51 colleagues banded together to found the Denver Artists Guild (DAG) in June. The new organization’s mission was, “To promote a spirit of professional cooperation and maintain a high standard of craftsmanship among the artists of Denver and vicinity, to bring to the attention of the public representative works of these artists in painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, and the graphic arts.”<sup>20</sup> The nonprofit guild was incorporated in 1968, and in 1990 changed its name to be more inclusive and is now known as the Colorado Artists Guild. Babcock was very active in promoting the guild’s aims, and fostering art appreciation in the region. In 1932, the Helen Dill Bequest came to the Denver Art Museum, leaving about \$120,000 for new acquisitions. Babcock worked with fellow DAG members Marion Hendrie (1876-1968) and Donald Bear (1905-1952), who became the museum director in 1935, to choose important late-nineteenth and early twentieth century French and American paintings for the museum’s permanent



Untitled [View of Yellowstone, Wyoming], circa early 1920s, ink on paper, 6 1/2 x 11 inches. Collection of Deborah and Warren Wadsworth

collection.<sup>21</sup>

In January of 1929, Guy Caldwell of the Estes Park YMCA wrote to Birger Sandzén in Lindsborg, Kansas, proposing a three-man print exhibition for the Newport Art Association in Rhode Island in March. The show would be comprised of twelve to fifteen prints from each of the artists Sandzén, Babcock, and Lyman Byxbe (1886-1980), a Nebraska etcher who had been summering in Estes Park since 1922 and later moved there to establish a thriving print studio.<sup>22</sup> Babcock continued to make and show his work, and to interest others in the process. In January 1932, the Babcocks were wintering in Biloxi, Mississippi, on the Gulf coast and the Biloxi Historical Society invited Dean to be a guest speaker on the topic of wood block prints. The local paper reported that “Mr Babcock’s own work in block prints was an amalgamation of the later European method and that of the Japanese. His works on display were used to illustrate the principles in creating wood block prints.”<sup>23</sup>

For the Denver Art Museum’s 39th annual exhibition in 1933, Babcock submitted *The Gorge*, *Biloxi Bay*, and *Pelicans* in the Prints and Drawings division. The jury included John Ankeney of Dallas, Birger Sandzén of Lindsborg, and Muriel Sibell of Boulder, Colorado. Honorable Mention awards were given and the woodcut *The Gorge* was noted as a prize winner. *The Gorge* was later selected for the frontispiece of Thomas Hornsby Ferril’s book of poems, *Westering*,



published by Yale University Press in 1934. Babcock also designed the cover decoration for the book. In 1934, Babcock was a member of the jury for the "Fortieth Annual Exhibition" at the Denver Art Museum, but did not submit any of his own work.

Babcock was founding member of the short-lived Rocky Mountain Print Makers organization, modeled on the Prairie Print Makers, which had been established in December of 1930 in Birger Sandzén's studio in Lindsborg. Sandzén was invited to submit entries to the first exhibition of the new print society, who noted in his day book for March 5th: "Sent to Rocky Mountain Print Makers. Under the auspices of the Denver Artists Guild, Denver Art Museum, 1300 Logan Street, Denver, Colo. March 5-April 1, 1934."<sup>24</sup> Open to artists all over the country, response was almost overwhelming with 400 submissions sent to the jury of selection. Of the 289 prints chosen for the exhibition, eight were awarded purchase prizes on behalf of the DAG and the Denver Art Museum. A second annual Rocky Mountain Print Makers exhibition was successfully mounted in April of 1935, also sponsored by DAG and held at the Denver Art Museum in the Chappell House. Babcock was on the jury for this second exhibition and out of 250 entries, 165 etchings, blockprints, and lithographs were chosen to show and six prints were picked as purchase prizes for the museum's permanent collection.<sup>25</sup> There was a third exhibition in 1936, but after that the DAG had to discontinue the annuals due to financial woes so common in the Great Depression.

The first issue of the DAG's monthly newsletter

*The Denver Artist* appeared in June of 1934. By the second issue, the title had been changed to *The Western Artist* in order to appeal to artists of neighboring states. The newsletter covering exhibitions, museum notes, and art book reviews along with providing short articles on a variety of topics. The March 1935 issue carried an insert reproducing Babcock's woodcut *The Waterfall*, and the introductory paragraph described the artist as "equally at home with painting, pen drawing, woodcutting, and engraving, wood carving, furniture and metal work. He is an illustrator, craftsman and designer of bookplates and seals" with his work collected "in many school and library collections, and in private collections in the United States and Europe."<sup>26</sup> The summary confirms Babcock studied with John Vanderpoel at the AIC and with Robert Henri in New York and in Spain, received scholarships to the New York School of Art, and had instruction in Japanese methods of wood block printmaking from Helen Hyde. The newsletter further notes Babcock had been teaching art history and graphic arts in the Denver school system, as well as topics in natural history, ornithology, and astronomy and map making.

*The Western Artist* reported on a wide variety of artist activities. In the December 1935 issue, the Boulder Art Association is noted as showing an exhibition of Kiowa Native American drawings, arranged and sponsored by Oscar Jacobson, director of the art department at the University of Oklahoma where he also founded the school's art museum, now known as the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. Although there are minimal



*Timberline Camp*, ca. 1935, woodcut on paper, 3 x 5 inches, Collection of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma

surviving records, it is believed that Jacobson purchased Babcock's woodcut *Timberline Camp* for the museum collection around this time. The Jacobsons kept a cabin in Allenspark, south of Estes Park, no doubt inspired by summer visits to Colorado with the Sandzén family and likely kept up ties with Dean Babcock during summer stays, as well. From 1926 Jacobson had been actively promoting the work of the "Kiowa Six" group of Oklahoman Native American artists, providing studio space at the university and scheduling exhibitions for them at such places as the Denver Art Museum and the 1932 Venice



Biennale. It is interesting to speculate whether Jacobson's efforts influenced Babcock's choice of subject matter at this time. Babcock's woodcut cover design for the Denver Public Library's book *The Shining Mountain* (1935) included in this exhibition shares compositional elements with *Timberline Camp*, particularly in the patterned borders top and bottom and the silhouette effect of figures shown against mountain ranges.

During these eventful years filled with DAG projects and making his own art, Babcock also served as a research associate for the print department of the Denver Art Museum. Donald Bear stepped in as director of the museum, and the two men were then tapped by the federal government for public service running the Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) in 1935. Babcock was appointed state director for the art project and Bear was to be the director on the regional level, coordinating Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Wyoming, and Arizona as one of 16 regions across the nation.<sup>27</sup>

In a 1979 interview, Denver artist William Traher (1908-1984) recalls Babcock as his WPA/FAP supervisor in 1937, the last year Traher was on the program. Traher focused on Babcock's skills as a mechanical engineer and scientist, rather than his art background. Done with his WPA project, Traher spent 1938 in the mountains with Babcock, building home additions and a studio, before continuing his own studies at Yale. He stayed less than a year in Connecticut, returning to Denver for mural projects at the Denver Museum of Natural History (now the Denver Museum of Nature & Science) along with undertaking more building contracts with Babcock.<sup>28</sup>

### **Estes Park Return**

By this time, Babcock's art production seems to have slowed down considerably, as he settled back into living full-time at the Ledges after several years based in Denver and concentrated on construction projects. The 1940 national census records Babcock's occupation as "Designer/Draftsman," employed 60 hours per week for an income of \$1,000, plus more from other, unnamed sources. The Estes Park home was valued at \$2,000, with Dean, Adele, and Eva residing there. Soon after settling in, the Babcock family endured a second mountain climbing death in 1938 when 19-year-old Sylvia's fiancé John

Fuller, a student at Iowa State College, fell when climbing Long's Peak. The young man had been up the peak thirteen times before and looked for a more challenging route the fourteenth time. Fuller decided to make the ascent solo, as Dean and Sylvia had gone to Denver for the day.<sup>29</sup> Sylvia went on to attend the University of Oklahoma, where she met and married Harold Tacker, and had a daughter of her own. A 1943 draft card shows the 54-year-old Babcock registered for World War II service. The card records the Babcocks still living on Long's Peak Road in Estes Park, with Dean listed as self-employed. A note on the card shows Babcock wasn't able to fill out the information himself but "Registered by phone on account of being snowbound."

The last known art endeavors undertaken by Dean Babcock were serving on the Colorado graphic arts committee of selection for the New York World's Fair of 1939 – although it does not appear he submitted any of his own prints – and then showing in the 1940 annual John H. Vanderpoel Memorial exhibition in Chicago. Babcock donated his entry to the Vanderpoel collection as was the usual practice for that venue. After that, the artist focused on building sundials and erecting them on sites around Colorado, and in 1961, in Winslow, Arkansas. After the installation, Babcock wrote an article about the design and construction for the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada."<sup>30</sup>

### **Seattle, Final Years**

In September of 1961, Dean and Adele visited daughter Eva in Bentonville, Arkansas, and drove to Seattle, Washington, where they settled to be close to Sylvia's family. On December 25, 1968, Dean Babcock died from pneumonia complications after suffering the effects of a stroke.<sup>31</sup> Thomas Hornsby Ferril (1896-1988), poet laureate of Colorado and editor of *The Rocky Mountain Herald* from 1939 through 1972, wrote a thoughtful remembrance of Dean Babcock in the paper when he learned of the artist's death. Ferril marveled at the many lives Babcock lived, musing that "it seems almost unreasonable to reconcile such varied competence within the frame and mind of this one shy and always youthful gentleman--for Dean was one of the gentlest men I ever knew. Naturalist, topographer, artist, wood carver, astronomer, musician, navigator, philosopher,



punster—and so unobtrusive about it all.”<sup>32</sup>

Ferril commented that “Dean’s wood engravings were creations of rare beauty, the color blocks always in perfect register.”<sup>33</sup> He remembered Babcock welcoming even commercial commissions, regularly designing illustrations and advertisements for a sugar company. Babcock also designed the masthead for *The Rocky Mountain Herald*, happily carving wood blocks on demand. Ferril recalled a conversation with the artist in which Babcock told of an early experience on the summit of Long’s Peak, watching a sunrise. The artist felt at that moment that it wasn’t the sun which was rising, but himself and the peak tilting to meet the dawn. Ferril concluded, “Dean Babcock was the only man I ever knew who could feel with integrity, and no affectation, that he was a privileged passenger on a turning globe.”<sup>34</sup>

Cori Sherman North

1. Thomas Hornsby Ferril, “Childe Herald,” (Denver) *Rocky Mountain Herald* (25 Jan 1969).
2. Joseph R. Evans, *Death, Despair and Second Chances in Rocky Mountain National Park* (Johnson Books, 2010), 30.
3. “Social and Personal,” *Estes Park Trail* v.2 no.11 (24 Aug 1912): 10.
4. “Opposed to Park Scheme,” [Sulphur Springs, CO] *Middle Park Times* v.30 no. 2 (12 May 1911): 1.
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