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ARTISTS' RENDERINGS

An Interview with Teresia Reid

Suzanne Bolton

Brushes, pens, graph paper, a drafting board, mat cutting tools, narrow drawers filled with paper supplies, bookshelves filled to capacity, a comfortable couch and easy chair are the components of Huntsville artist Teresia Reid's studio. This is the setting where Mrs. Reid captures with pen, pencil, and watercolor the buildings of bygone days and helps preserve the memories of the past for occupants of the present. Her warm, friendly smile and bright eyes make one feel welcome and at home in her workplace.

It is hard to imagine that Huntsville and its environs have changed so much that this attractive, youthful-looking artist could have a historian's perspective on the rapid growth of the area. Yet, Teresia Reid's stories of growing up in Madison emphasize the speed with which change has taken place around us during the past three decades.

In the late 1940s, Teresia Shelton and her family rode the train from Madison to Huntsville when they came to town to buy groceries. Highway 20 did not exist then, nor were there any high schools in Madison. Teresia came to Butler High School on a school bus driven by the students! She fondly remembers Sunday afternoons when the family came to Huntsville for an ice cream cone at Tom Dark's Drug Store and an afternoon of visiting with family who lived in "the city."

Hoyte and Septimia Shelton, along with their twin daughters, Teresia and Patricia, moved to Madison in 1947. Hoyte had grown up in Madison and returned to his roots following World War II. Madison's population then was about 1100, most of whom were farmers and many of whom sought the

services offered in the barber shop Mr. Shelton established on Main Street.

Though the lifestyles of 1992 Madison contrast sharply with those of yesteryear, some of the old lingers for younger generations to enjoy. Driving down Main Street today, one sees Shelton's Barber Shop still operating across the railroad tracks from graceful old homes, facing a street enchantingly named Buttermilk Alley. A few miles away, modern homes have been built along Shelton Road named for Teresia's grandfather.

When Teresia's future husband moved to the Huntsville area to work with the Army Ballistic Missile Agency in 1956, the space age boom was in its infancy and, like most boom towns, Huntsville was hardly ready for the influx of population it was experiencing. There were no places for rent in the city, so Harry Reid rented the only room available in Madison. Fortunately, that room was just across the street from the Sheltons' home, and romance soon blossomed. Teresia and Harry were married in 1960.

Teresia's formal art instruction began with a class in oil painting. "After that I felt I needed more instruction. I knew how to draw," she says, "but I had trouble with colors and needed a teacher."

One evening while attending a Bible study at a friend's home, Teresia saw many beautiful paintings and discovered the artist was also the teacher of the Bible study, Larry Casso. When Teresia asked him to teach her watercolor painting he declined, explaining he had no teaching experience. Teresia persisted with her request, and at last Mr. Casso agreed to teach her if she could find four others also interested in the class. She found the others and Mr. Casso taught them for a year and a half. Later he moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana where he opened his own art school.

Teresia has taken lessons from other private instructors in Huntsville and has broadened her artistic abilities through

classes at UAH and workshops given by nationally known artists.

“I’ve also learned a tremendous amount from working on my own and with fellow artist, Joy Beeson,” she smiles.

Teresia, along with several other local artists, formed the Association of Community Artists. At first, the Association held two art shows per year, but several members decided to show their works more often. They were offered the use of a house on Governors Drive and some sixteen members exhibited there. Some time later, these same members incorporated and began the Art House Gallery now located on Lily Flagg Road and then on Madison Street. Public exhibition of Teresia’s work was well received. The positive response of viewers encouraged her career. She values highly her years of involvement with the Art House Gallery. “Wonderful friendships resulted from that group!” she exclaims.

“I’ve always loved architecture,” Teresia explains when asked why and how she chooses what she will paint. “I carry my camera with me wherever I go,” she explains. “That way I can take pictures of old homes and other buildings when I see one which interests me.” Teresia paints from these photographs in rare spare moments between commissioned work.

Many clients bring Teresia old photographs of ancestral homes, commissioning a Reid watercolor of their photo often to be presented as an heirloom gift to a member of the family. Her watercolors are produced by a multi-step process. Teresia makes “meticulous drawings” of the photo on graph paper. These drawings, she states, are the most time-consuming phase of the production process. The drawing is then transferred to watercolor paper and the final product is painted. Each commissioned piece takes between forty and sixty hours to produce. She estimates that she completes two to three paintings each month. She has painted buildings found in Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee, and

most of her work is done on a commission basis. Currently she has commissions through the end of 1992.

Among the many Huntsville buildings Teresia has painted are the pen and ink drawings reproduced here: Huntsville Depot, Madison County Courthouse — 1914 - 1964, Constitution Hall, the Burritt Museum, the Weeden House, and Cedarhurst. Others include the Steamboat Gothic House, the Church of the Nativity, the Schrimsher Home, First National Bank, the Annie Merts Center, the Fleming Home, the Hughes Home in Madison, and the Albert McDonald Farmhouse.

Before her visitor departs, Teresia proudly points out the original Albert Lane painting hanging in her living room and relates the story behind it. Several years ago Teresia heard that an Albert Lane painting was to be offered at a local benefit auction. With great excitement, she and Harry decided to bid on the painting and agreed on a ceiling price. When the bidding went beyond that amount, Teresia was deeply disappointed.

“I so wanted one of his paintings,” she told Harry.

Shortly after the auction, Mr. Lane, who had been sitting in front of Teresia during the bidding, introduced himself. He said he'd overheard her expressions of disappointment and promised to paint Teresia her own picture. She was thrilled by his generosity and was greatly moved when Mr. and Mrs. Lane delivered the painting personally. This episode tells us a great deal about the artistic community and the character of Albert Lane, another Huntsville artist who will be featured in the next issue of our *Quarterly*.







