

February 2025 Edition

DEPARTMENTS

In Memoriam

Virginia Couse Leavitt: 1932-2024

Virginia Couse Leavitt was only 3 years old when her grandfather, Eanger Irving Couse died, in 1936. Her memories of him were vague and faded, but much of her life was devoted to preserving his important legacy in the Southwest. Leavitt, the tireless champion of the Taos Society of Artists and the co-founder of the Couse-Sharp Historic Site, died November 26, 2024, in Taos, New Mexico. She was 92 years old.



Virginia Couse Leavitt with Davison Koenig, Couse-Sharp Historic Site executive director and curator, on the Taos porch of Eanger Irving Couse. Photo courtesy Josh Rose.

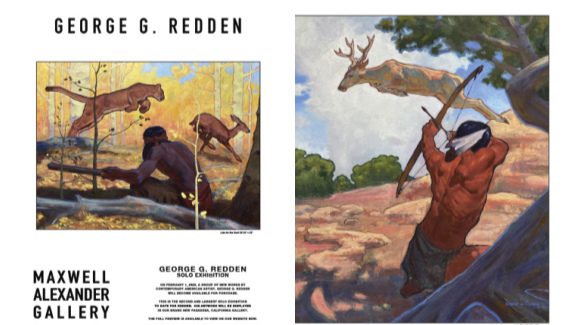
Leavitt, known as Ginnie to many in Taos and the broader Western art community, was a beloved figure in Northern New Mexico, where her advocacy for Taos and its art culture radiated around the world. In addition to co-founding the Couse-Sharp Historic Site, she also helped establish the Lunder Research Center at the site in 2021. The center serves as repository and archive for materials related to the Taos Society of Artists.

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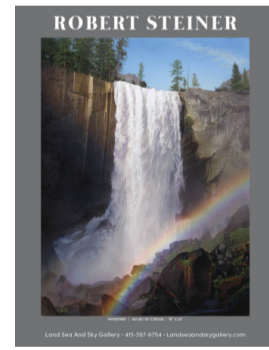
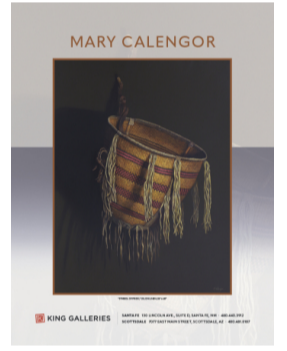
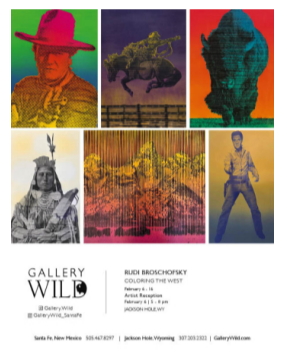
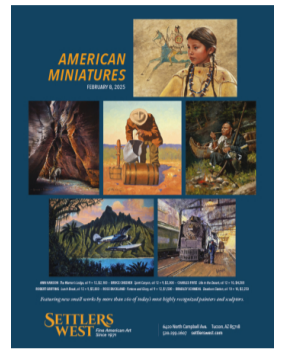
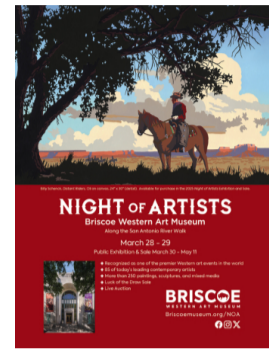
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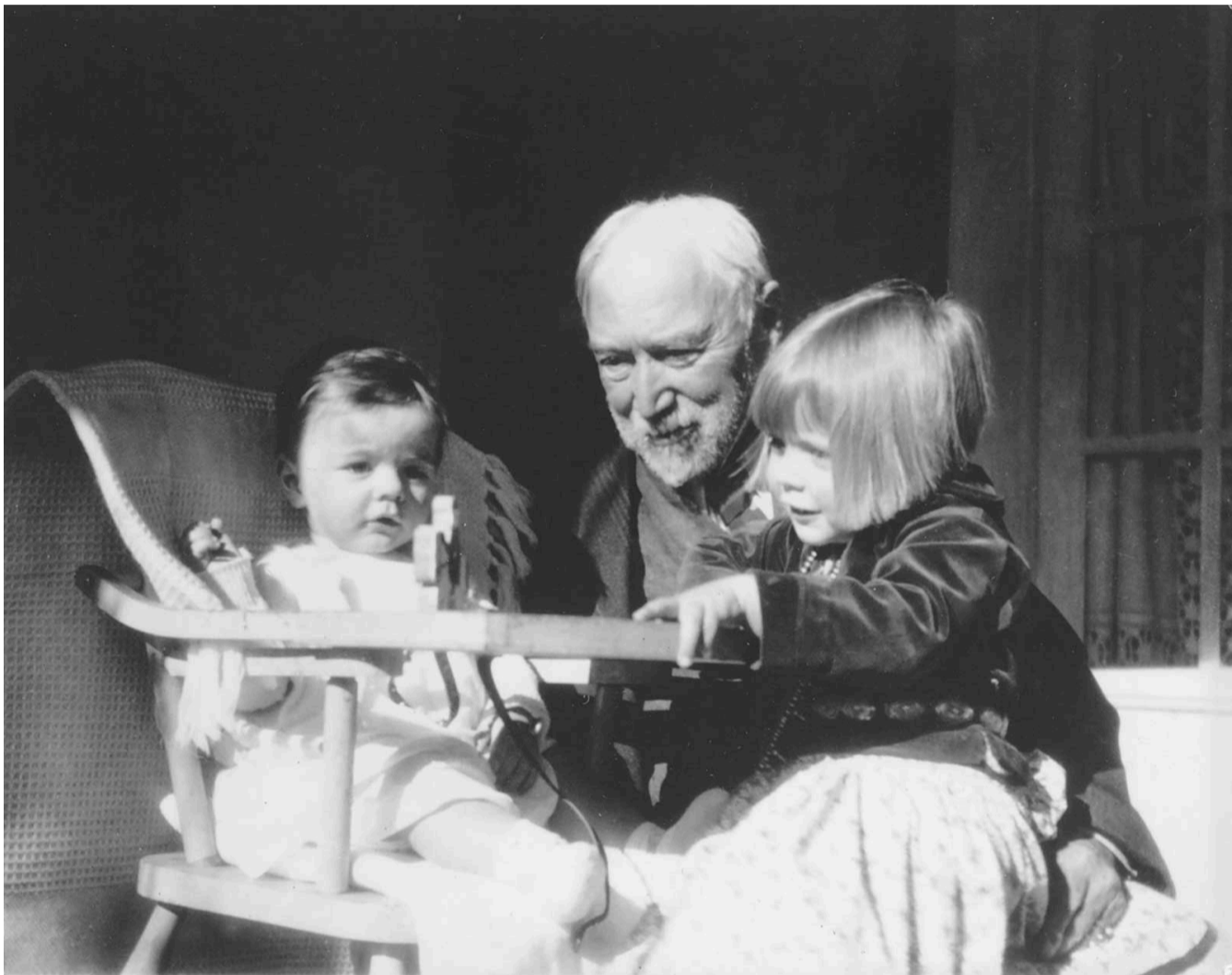
“Speaking for the staff, board, and others associated with the [Couse-Sharp Historic Site], we are bereft. That’s an old-fashioned word, but as a fine writer and a lover of language, Ginnie would approve, I believe. Even through her last years, she has been present in all our lives, keenly interested and involved in the programs and operations of the site. The preservation of the buildings and grounds, and ensuring that the archive and collections remain available and relevant to future scholars through the Lunder Research Center, was her life’s work,” Davison Koenig, Couse-Sharp Historic Site executive director and curator, wrote in a statement. “Ginnie is the soul of Couse-Sharp Historic Site, and I say that in the present tense. She created and embodied a culture of not only dedication and excellence but also close relationships and goodwill. These are key to why and how we have been successful in our mission. She called the good luck and can-do spirit of this organization ‘Couse mojo,’ and she believed in it fully. We’ve always suspected that the mojo was really her love and care, and we will carry that and all facets of her legacy with us into the future.”



Joseph Henry Sharp, left, with Virginia Couse Leavitt, her brother Irving Couse, and Louise Sharp, Henry’s wife. Courtesy Couse-Sharp Historic Site.



Leavitt was born in Raton, New Mexico, but later spent the first years of her life growing up in her grandfather's Taos house during the final years of his life. She later spent time in California, Illinois and in Tucson, Arizona, where she received her master's in art history from the University of Arizona. She also met her husband in Arizona, Ernest E. Leavitt. After the death of her father—Kibbey Whitman Couse, Eanger Irving Couse's only child—Leavitt opened her grandfather's home and studio in Taos to discover it was largely untouched since the 1930s. Leavitt and her husband began the long process maintaining and restoring the property, which included two studios of Couse colleague Joseph Henry Sharp. The artists were two of six founders of the Taos Society of Artists, formed in 1915. Today the 2.3-acre site is one the great art locations in Western art, a destination artists and collectors make regular pilgrimages to celebrate the TSA and art in the Southwest.

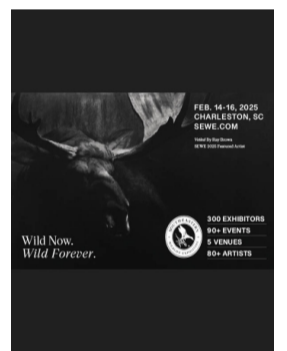
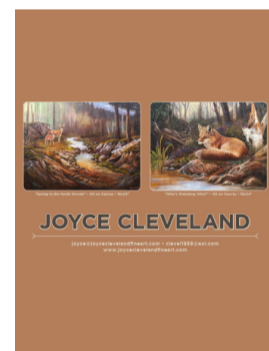
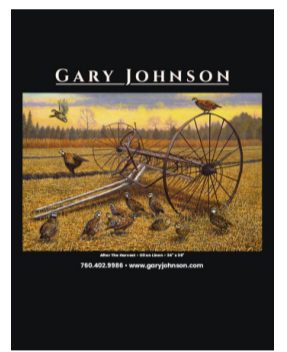
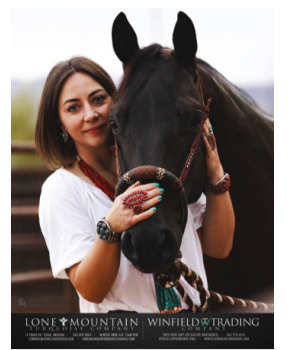


Virginia Couse Leavitt, right, with her grandfather, painter Eanger Irving Couse, and brother Irving. Photo by Kibbey Couse. Courtesy Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

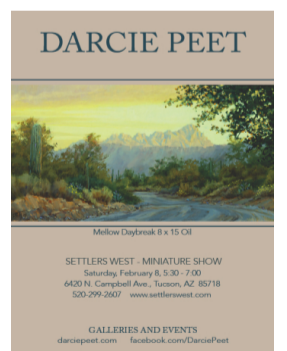
In addition to being a driving force at the Couse-Sharp Historic Site, Leavitt was also a Couse scholar. Her 2019 book *Eanger Irving Couse: The Life and Times of an American Artist, 1866-1936*, is a definitive text on the artist. Leavitt also helped establish the Couse Foundation to help secure the site's future for many generations to come.



Virginia Couse Leavitt with her late husband, Ernie Leavitt, on the Couse portal in 2013. Photo by Lenny Foster.

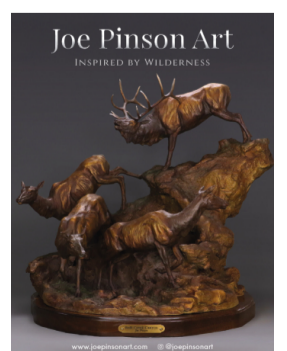
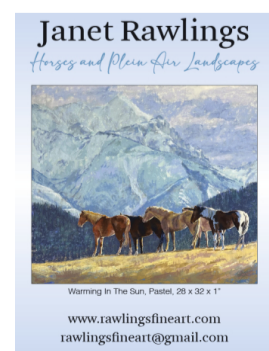


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In a release announcing Leavitt's passing, art scholar Marie Watkins called Leavitt a vital contributor to her grandfather's legacy. "Ginnie meticulously researched the details of the life of E.I. Couse, his art and collections. She presented countless public presentations locally and throughout the country, and her biography is the definitive scholarly source on Couse," Watkins says. "Through her hands-on effort, she realized her dream to transform the Couse property into the epicenter for research and scholarship of the Taos Society of Artists and other early Taos artists. The historic site is the tangible conservation of cultural identity, where one feels the Taos past, present and future."



Bronze bust of Virginia Couse-Leavitt by Ed Smida now installed in the library at the Lunder Research Center. Photo courtesy Ed Smida/Couse-Sharp Historic Site.

Word of her passing reverberated through the art world, with many painters reflecting on kind and encouraging words she had offered to many artists. California painter Glenn Dean noted that "Ginnie had an infectious smile that could make anyone feel good," he says. "She had a sparkle in her eyes that radiated from the kindness in her heart."

Josh Elliott, the landscape painter from Montana, noted in a statement: "There is now a huge void in Taos and the greater Western art world. This gentle icon will be missed by so many people." —

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