

1821 Alamo Avenue
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80907

November 8, 1969

Dear Laura -

It was so nice seeing
you again last week - and I was
most pleased that you took the
time, with all you had to do, to
come and call -

Everyone was thrilled to see
you - we all are sure your
show will be a great success -

I thought you might like an
extra clipping of the Gazette interview.
It was quite good, I thought

Best of luck, and love

Norma Dodge

Abiding Interest in Navahos Lifelong Passion of Artist

By PEGGY JAMES

Gazette Telegraph Staff Writer

"The Navahos have a special quality," says Laura Gilpin. A noted photographer for the past 30 years, she has been capturing and defining this quality since the 1920's. Her sensitive lens have probed behind the inscrutable Indian, so often misunderstood, and found a compelling vista into the Navaho culture, to which few others have had access.

Interviewed at the Fine Arts Center as she prepared for an exhibition of her prints which begins Thursday, Miss Gilpin talked of her role as a chronicler of the Navahos, the largest Indian tribe.

She began by saying, "You know, I do other things besides Indian works but I wonder I have a reputation for being an Indian artist. I started photographing the Navahos in 1923."

She told that a trip in 1920 into the Indian reservation with a friend, Elizabeth Farnes, in which they got lost and ran out of gas, whetted her curiosity about the Indian. Walking it makes without seeing a began or but, is a trading post for gasoline, she returned to find her friend surrounded by friendly Navahos, playing cards and trying to help them. The friend returned to the reservation two years later to work as a visiting nurse and the photographer, haunted by these people, began to travel around the reservation taking pictures whenever she could.

Miss Gilpin, born in Colorado Springs in 1880, fondly recalls that her father and William Olin planted the willow trees, now so lovely in Austin Park, in the months after her parents came from their ranch 65 miles away to town awaiting her birth.

She denies the San Francisco Exposition in 1915 as the catalyst for her awakening interest in the arts. She laughs, adding, "It was my first contact with painting, sculpture. I had a camera along and went overboard."

She attended the Clifton B. White School of Photography in New York, studied under Miss Weber and graduated in 1908. She worked 10 years in New York but didn't want to become a permanent part of the "city's rat race," deciding she would rather be poor and happy in the southwest.

She lived for a time in Colorado Springs. She did architectural photography for Fisher and Fisher in Denver. In addition to portrait work, she produced pamphlets on the Pike Peak Region and Mesa Verde. She chronicled five years of the Central City Opera which Robert Edmund Jones produced.

During the war years, she worked as a public relations photographer in the Boeing B-26 plant in Wichita, Kan.

Still, she returned again and again to the Indian reservations. Unable to deter any longer, she moved in 1945 to Santa Fe where she resides yet.

There have been fruitful years. The first book was "The Pueblo: A Camera Chronicle," followed by "Temples in Yucatan" and "The Rio Grande: River of Destiny." She says of the latter, "I started the Rio Grande photos on rationed gasoline. It took three years and traces the river from source to mouth." The book, now out of print, is considered a collector's item.

Returning to the subject nearest to her, Miss Gilpin next created her latest book, "The Enduring Navaho," in 1949 for which she wrote the text to correlate with the photographs.

The book, 35 years in the making is considered a classic. It records with affection and compassion the transition of the Navaho from their awakening in 1880s into their emerging role into the modern civilization. Of it she says, "I was terribly concerned with the unity of the pictures and text." She considers photography to be the essential medium for recording and interpreting the changes of these people.

"They are wonderful people, I wanted to portray the human touch, the actual feeling of the people," she says, explaining that most people don't realize the depth of the Navaho personality. "For a long time, Indians were a curiosity," she says with deep feeling.

Continuing she discusses the changes that are taking place. Many Navahos are college educated and have adapted to the 20th Century very well. Their personalities are quite integrated, she states. She feels it stems from their extraordinary

religion, their dignity, vitality of Indian America have been grasped and ability to accept the inevitable facts of life.

Warning to her subject, Miss Gilpin says, "They have great sensitivity and a sense of humor when they know you well." She speaks of their quickness to catch any trace of feelings of superiority which may come from insensitive persons. When doing so, they immediately quietly withdraw into their wistful state of acceptance, she says.

Of the exhibition at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, she reveals that it is, in part, a film show. After her last show in Oklahoma City, the prints were crated and shipped by air freight. One hundred fifty prints, more than a year's work, disappeared without a trace, so, substitutions of a show held at the Center for Arts and

made.

Characteristically Miss Gilpin says, "I will not regret them but will get on into something else." What else, she isn't quite sure at the moment. Her only concession to the years is her simple statement, "It will be whatever I'm physically able to do."

All her photography work is done with an 8 by 10 view camera. She uses a Graphflex only for action.

Her alert, acute blue eyes fix on a distant point as she musingly says, "Once you have an Indian friend, you can never forget it." Her intensity of concern is revealed as she thoughtfully adds, "I may do another book on the Indians. There are still so many changes to record."



MISS LAURA GILPIN WITH PRINT—Miss Laura Gilpin looks fondly at one print she did of the Navaho people. This print, one of the many of the exhibi-

tion opening Thursday at the Fine Arts Center, demonstrates her abiding interest chronicling the transition of the Navaho into modern America.

(Gazette Telegraph Photo)