

"Doc" Udell—The Taos Man

To write of Taos and of Udell is, in a very real sense, to write of paradox. Any adjective used to describe either Taos or Udell has a contradictory counterpart....Taos has bred and nourished the Indian, the Spanish-American, and the Anglo; the poet, the painter, and the mountain man; the rancher, the mystic, and the murderer; the farmer, the bruja, and the international society leader; the opportunist, the genius, and the tourist.

Collecting adjectives to describe Udell, I simply took the following from letters and conversations of his friends and relatives: tremendous, intense, impulsive, dedicated, tender, brutal, dynamic, modest, appalling, compassionate, creative, prejudiced, awe-inspiring, gentle, striking, humble, strong.

Call him what you want—Doctor Udell, Isaac, or just plain Udell—he is a Taos man...Taos is one of the few remaining links to the very old ways of life which preceded the Christian missionary, the Spanish priest, the civilized Anglo, the inevitable course of empire....Strange as it may seem to many modernists and city-dwellers, there are values of the land and spirit which are worth preserving, which must be preserved, if we are to remember that we are only [humans], and that the earth and sky are our environment, and that in the end we return to 'the dust of the valley.'

--From afterword by editor John Milton, concluding I.L. Udell's *In The Dust of the Valley*

The Life Work of Doc Udell

"I believe in Man's dignity to Man measured by the excellence of his individual profound endeavor for the benefit of Collective Man; I believe in the purity of man's human relationship to man—and to his environment and resources."

--Words from I.L. Udell himself

The stacks of paintings, never exhibited, lying dusty in an old shed. His writings, never published but for the one we are about to read. The mountain of work done, the babies delivered, the sick healed, the love and adoration of the people of Taos. The home he built and the worlds he conquered. And yet he has avoided fame as most men run from fame. He loses interest in a creation once it's completed, and perhaps somehow he feels that the world also will have lost interest, even before it has had a chance to examine his work.

Doc Udell was a chiropractor for more than thirty years. In addition he delivered over 3,300 babies, served in the Army as a doctor, built a large adobe home by hand, wrote a manuscript, and painted a series of thirteen massive oil paintings entitled "Los Hermanos Penitentes."

--Observations of actor Rick Jason, visiting Udell in 1966

It is difficult to say what his profession has really been. His professional degree was in chiropractic medicine, and he practiced as a chiropractor in Taos as well as in Colorado.

He has been, and is, a writer of some sensitivity, an oil painter, a water colorist, a sculptor, and a carver of such things as chairs, cradles, Spanish Colonial chests, doors, vigas and tables. It is not outlandish to say that Doc Udell might have been a nationally-known artist in any of several fields, had he chosen to be one. The impression I get of him, however, is dominated by a feeling of simple doing and giving.

Udell worked in order to give himself to his people and his environment. Such a man has no easily labeled profession; he is simply a man. He is a man who leaves a contribution.

--Observations of John R. Milton, editor of Udell's manuscript

A Partial Life Timeline of Doc Udell

Compiled hastily by Todd Wynward, Spring 2014

May 20, 1904: Isaac Lamoreaux Udell, named after his grandfather, born in Michigan.

1910: first came West as a six-year old with his family, moving incessantly between small towns in Colorado and NM. Udell went to fourteen schools before he finished the eighth grade.

1924: first saw Taos, decided it would be his home. Finished his D.C. degree at Palmer College in Davenport, Iowa, then returned to Taos to build both a home and a substantial practice. Details about his first marriage are unclear.

1934-39: somewhere in this period, Udell wrote the manuscript of "In the Dust of the Valley" and painted "Los Hermanos Penitentes."

Late 1930's: Following domestic problems, he left Taos and began to paint in Leadville, set up a chiropractic practice in Denver, and completed the "Los Hermanos" series.

1942-44: served in the Army. After discharge, became Chief Sanitary Officer at the Japanese Relocation Center at Amanche in CO.

1945-49: "again" enrolled in Univ of Colorado in art, completed enough hours for two degrees he did not take. Perhaps during this time married Irene Dalzell, second wife. Perhaps divorced when his daughter was six.

1950-65: came back to Taos to write and paint, but instead found a waiting medical practice. During this fifteen-year period he reestablished his office, became a part of the community, built a home, raised twin daughters and three sons [by himself, it appears].

1964: Taos High had a new English teacher, Joy Newton, who immediately became the favorite of two of Udell's children, Cathy and Farrell. Within two weeks of meeting the sixty-year old doctor, she became the new Mrs. Udell.

1969: Udell now living in Hawaii, it appears. His thirty-year old writings were discovered by editor John R. Milton and published in the South Dakota Review. This written collection is showcased in Taos at the same time as his paintings are displayed at the Harwood.

Died: Unclear.

From Rick Jason: Twenty-three years passed before I learned his first name, and I understand that I'm one of the few who ever addresses him by it. Intimates call him Udell; the less privileged call him "Doctor"....Three years ago, he confided to me his first name. He said he'd always felt too young to carry it, that it is a name that should never be placed on a boy. Then he admitted that perhaps the time had come, that perhaps he is now patriarchal enough for it.