

Santa Fe Poster Genius

Discovering more about Louis Treviso and identifying a lost *California Limited* poster

By MICHAEL E. ZEGA

The task of finding personal information about the lives of the artists who created the advertising art for railroads in the first half of the last century has proved to be both daunting and rewarding. Many of the individuals who did strikingly original compositions were ignored in the art world and their work, often unsigned, went unrecognized by the public and sometimes even by their clients.

Louis Treviso is a case in point. The creator of the Santa Fe Railway's acclaimed poster style remained stubbornly elusive to me during more than a decade of research on the subject of railroad advertising. Yet Treviso ranks among the most significant of early 20th century advertising artists. The past few months, however, have brought a remarkable change of fortune—two separate con-

tacts that have significantly increased my knowledge of the man and his work.

Out of the blue, I received an e-mail message from the Treviso family that led to the privilege of interviewing his daughter,

Helen Treviso Castro, last September. Now 80 and living in Whittier, Calif., Helen helped fill in some of the details of her father's life. She explained that, contrary to contemporary accounts that labeled Treviso as Mexican, the family actually had its roots in the Italian city of the same name. Louis' father had emigrated from Treviso, Italy, to Mexico City, and then crossed into the United States.

Born in a covered wagon along a desert trail in 1889, the future artist climbed out of the window of his fourth-grade classroom in Arizona, determined to pursue his talent for lettering,



Michael Zega Collection

Modernistic ad placed by Treviso in L.A. newspaper in 1912.