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“It’s all Spiled.” — The Theme of Change in *The Big Sky*

by Anthony L. Lehman

Perhaps better than any other work of fiction, A.B. Guthrie's *The Big Sky* evokes the era of the mountain men, that hardy breed who fled the confines of civilization to lead a primitive, perilous, but free existence pursuing the beaver within an American wilderness that was as yet both beautiful and unspoiled. It would be a mistake, however, to view the book simply as a paean to a romantic and isolated period in the history of the American West, for Guthrie places his novel accurately — as well as vividly — in an historical context of change. The heyday of the mountain men was, after all, relatively shortlived, and we see that the process of change is already at work, ironically, when the protagonist Boone Caudill sets out to become a fur trapper. Indeed, as Boone himself is transformed from a raw, inexperienced youth into a capable and self-reliant mountain man, other changes are at work in the physical West that will undermine and then eliminate the very lifestyle he has chosen: the overtrapping of beaver, a preference that arises for cheaper silk hats, the decimation of both the buffalo and the native Indian tribes, and the westward movement of settlers in the vanguard of civilization.

To properly understand the novel, therefore, it should be viewed in terms of the theme of change because it is this idea which

permeates virtually every chapter. Furthermore, this process of change occurs simultaneously in several of the fictional characters (though primarily in Boone Caudill) on the one hand and, on the other, within the well-researched historical framework wherein the characters function.

We see an important facet of Boone Caudill's personality in the very first chapter of *The Big Sky*, namely his penchant for violence. He has broken Mose Napier's jaw in a drunken tavern fight and, when his father takes him out to the woodpile for punishment, Boone grabs a handy log and cracks his father over the head. Temperamentally, then, this is a young man who is obviously well-equipped to cope with the brawling and bloodshed of life in the Far West and, responding to the “safety valve” represented by the frontier, Boone flees home. Before he leaves he filches his father's prized gun, Old Sure Shot, and also his razor strop, both obvious symbols: the rifle representing the self-reliant aspect of the Code of the West (he can protect and also feed himself with the weapon), whereas the razor strop serves as a symbol of his breaking away from home and family to commence becoming a man. This latter concept inaugurates the old rites of passage theme, but dressed out in buckskin and buffalo robes this time.

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THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

APRIL

Past Sheriff Earl Adams addressed the Corral on the Custer tragedy. For over 100 years the controversy of the disaster at the Battle of the Little Big Horn has continued to excite historians and buffs alike. Numerous interpretations of Custer's personality, ambition, and capability have been published, and while there is no mystery over what happened at the battle, people are still arguing about why it happened. Adams became interested in the Custer controversy over 35 years ago when he personally visited the battlefield. The question lingered: how could a West Point graduate and experienced

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Photograph by Frank Q. Newton



EARL ADAMS

It is worth observing that Boone goes West for two primary reasons, both historically valid. Like so many individuals, he leaves to escape his past, where he is now wanted by the law for both assault and theft. Secondly, he has heard exciting and adventurous tales of life in the Rockies from his mountain man Uncle Zeb Calloway; like many other impressionable youths, Boone (his name is no accident, having relevant overtones suggesting another restless spirit) finds such a free, action-filled existence alluring.

He has much to learn, however, on his road to the mountains and to manhood. Typically, he shares his meal with another itinerant, Jonathan Bedwell, true once more to the Code of the West's belief in hospitality and in helping one's fellow man. In return, Bedwell violates the Code when he steals Old Sure Shot. Boone Caudill, at this point, is still far from being self-reliant; he is too naive, too trusting, too deficient in sizing up others.

When he manages to get Old Sure Shot back after trailing Bedwell and fighting him, the precious gun is taken away again, this time by a sheriff who is skeptical about how such a fine and valuable rifle could be in the possession of someone as shabbily dressed as Boone now is. And Boone doesn't dare reveal how he came to have the gun originally. When he's arrested, beaten by the sadistic sheriff, and tried by a drunken judge, the reader rightly views this entire episode as symbolic of the evil and the corruption inherent in these so-called "civilized" habitations, a bad taste that will only be dissipated by the contrast to come with the pure and stunningly beautiful natural environment for which Boone is headed.

Part II begins after a three-week lapse of time spent in Louisville waiting for passage up the Missouri River on a keelboat. On his last night in town, Boone achieves another milestone of sorts on his path to maturity: he loses his virginity with a one-dollar prostitute. The venereal disease he contracts manifests itself before long, yet Boone is predictably reluctant to tell his new friend, Jim Deakins, and his mentor-to-be Dick Summers, about the symptoms he is experiencing. To do so would be to appear "like a green 'un," and Boone is too proud, too intent on becoming a man, to say a word. It would seem then that *machismo* is a byword in the West. We have seen it before, for example, in such frontier classics as Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* and Theodore Roosevelt's *Ranch Life in the Far*

West.

Dick Summers, probably the most admirable and sympathetic character in the entire book, has himself been a mountain man for many years, acquiring long ago the abilities needed for success and survival in such an arduous occupation. He will prove to be a kind of foster father to Boone, guiding him, instructing him, and serving as a role model. The theme of change, too, is no less applicable to Summers. Further on in the novel, Dick notices that he is short of breath after running from some Indians, whereas physical exertion is something he has always done with comparative ease. His hair is also beginning to turn white. So it comes as no surprise when Summers ultimately hangs up his traps and opts to return to the comforts of life in a settled area back in Missouri. But more of him later.

Two more significant events occur in quick succession to further Boone's metamorphosis from boyhood to manhood. When the keelboat passes the Platte River, his head is shaved as a form of initiation into that special group of individuals who have left the civilized East and crossed the symbolic border into the frontier. And, not long afterward, Boone Caudill shoots his first buffalo and his first Indian. Significantly, he fails to kill either, evidence that he remains in need of Dick Summers' tutelage and further experience in survival skills. He did at least hit the targets, something a rank tenderfoot might not have done, so Boone is gradually learning.

The Indians in the West are also living in a condition of change as the result of the advent of the white man into their territory, and the result is far from salutary. At Cabanne's Trading Post, Boone's first glimpse of the fabled noble savage consists of an old, pockmarked male with one eye missing, and a fat, ugly squaw bent on propositioning the entire group. It is not an accident that these Indians who live the closest to white civilization show the greatest ravages. In a word, Guthrie is saying that contact with the Anglo world morally corrupts and physically debilitates the American Indian, a phenomenon seen repeatedly in *The Big Sky*. Teal Eye, the beautiful young Indian girl of whom Boone is so enamored, is an exception of course at this stage of the novel, for momentarily at least she serves as a symbol of an unsullied race. Later on, however, she too will be victimized.

Perhaps one of the best indicators that

Boone has shed the trappings of the world of the East is the fact that by Chapter XVI he has "traded in" his cotton and wool garments and is now clothed in buckskin — what Theodore Roosevelt called "the most picturesque and distinctively national dress ever worn in America." We see, too, that the transformation goes deeper than such externals when, in the same chapter, it is Boone himself who detects the two men trying to sneak into their camp at night to cut their boat free, or else burn it. His senses have obviously been honed to the fine edge demanded by wilderness living. At this juncture, Boone finally appears ready to successfully take on the life of a mountain man: he is physically stronger than when he first left home, used to privation, possessed of keen senses, and equipped to handle a rifle in the face of man or beast.

It is ironic, therefore, when Boone meets his Uncle Zeb Calloway only to hear the grizzled old man declare that it's "ten year too late anyhow. . . . She's gone; goddam it! Gone. . . . The whole shitaree." According to Zeb, the buffalo and beaver have largely vanished, forts are being built up and down the Missouri, and the wilderness is filling up with people. As if to highlight his point, Zeb is now hunting meat to supply Fort Union, rather than setting his traps in the coldwater streams of the Rocky Mountain fastness. He even refuses to join Dick Summers, Jim Deakins, and his nephew when they urge him to join their party. It would prove pointless.

Historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" refers to "the changes of an expanding people — to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life." It would seem, then, that Boone Caudill has arrived in the West at a moment of transition: the era of the mountain man has virtually ended and the wilderness has been won to at least the extent that the next wave of growth and development is already advanced. Boone's timing is most inopportune; the old order is passing. It is as though he had apprenticed himself to a wheelwright at the dawn of the age of the pneumatic tire.

It might be sheer perversity that leads Boone to ignore his uncle's advice. Or perhaps he has simply set his sights on becoming a

mountain man because of the mystique which surrounds that intrepid and admirable band, "the archetype of freedom" Theodore Roosevelt dubbed them. More than likely, however, Boone's unwillingness to change or modify his goal is the result of a severe character flaw — a kind of blindness to the realities that surround him. This same theme of blindness will play a crucial role later on in the denouement of the novel.

As Part III opens, seven years have elapsed and our band of trappers has clearly managed to eke out a subsistence. But there remain the ominous signs of change. At the previous rendezvous — a notoriously riotous male blowout — several preachers and women show up, denoting a marked change in the usual atmosphere. (Guthrie undoubtedly had Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and their Oregon-bound group in mind for this historic incident.) What better harbingers of change than the civilizing factors represented by clergymen and women. And this year's rendezvous is also fraught with developments that portend the end of an era. Only one fur-trading company is on hand to buy pelts, and with the lack of competition, this company gets away with paying only half of what a beaver skin formerly realized. The Indians are equally conscious of being cheated by the traders, and their crankiness is exacerbated by their seeing white men more and more overrunning their lands. No wonder, then, that Dick Summers decides at this juncture to return to Missouri and settle down on a little farm. He has more prescience than Boone, though his age admittedly inclines him to accept or at least adapt to the inevitable permutations that have occurred. Unfortunately, Dick's departure leaves Boone without the steady, guiding wisdom that has thus far nurtured him. Boone is now free to make his own mistakes — and he does, quickly.

In his search for Teal Eye, which has now become a veritable obsession, Boone comes across the grisly remains of an Indian village decimated by smallpox, bodies everywhere, some half-eaten by coyotes and magpies. Disease is another insidious legacy of change bequeathed by the white man.

Boone at last locates Teal Eye and the two are married, a symbolic union of the two races. Boone, by this time, has become a kind of "white savage" to the extent that he is astonishingly comfortable living as an

Indian, pursuing the buffalo, and fighting occasional skirmishes with the Crows and Sioux for excitement, to keep in shape, or merely for the zest of it. But one has the sensation that living with a woman and as an Indian is much too tame, too domesticated for someone like Boone. Teal Eye's announcement that she was going to have a child caused Boone more anxiety than it did pleasure; he will only be tied down further. Moreover, the same restless itch that impelled him to move West is still evident, perhaps deeply ingrained in his nature—as it seems to be in the American character. Even the attentive, submissive, wifely ministrations of Teal Eye (who adopts the same self-effacing behavior of the Indian women in Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*) fail to assuage Boone's wanderlust. Perhaps Guthrie is highlighting here a marked difference between the two races, one that would preclude the possibility of them ever living harmoniously and happily as one.

Philosophically, too, Boone is at odds with his adopted people. His brother-in-law, Red

Horn, perceives the beginning of the end for his nation: "We are a few now, and we are weak and tired, and our men drink the strong water and will not go far from the white man's trading house. They quarrel with one another. The white man's sickness kills them." Characteristically, Boone naively keeps his head in the sand with an exasperating blindness and persistence: "The nation will grow strong. The white man will leave us. We shall be many and have buffalo and beaver and live as the old ones lived."

It seems astonishing, therefore, that Boone would agree to show Elisha Peabody, who is headed for Oregon, a passable route through the Rockies in winter. Restlessness is the only explanation for Boone voluntarily, perhaps blindly, participating in an act that can only facilitate the further inroads of immigrants, all to the detriment of his chosen lifestyle.

Peabody is an interesting character, though admittedly a far cry from the typical mountain man. He represents the second wave of the westward pioneering movement, the man who has a vision of settlers on the



Arthur Hunnicutt and Kirk Douglas enjoy the charms of Teal Eye in RKO's 1952 version of *The Big Sky*.

land, farms, and towns. In some way he strikes the reader as inordinately sissified or refined. The deliciously effete overtones of his name reinforce this impression and, appropriately, he sips wine rather than guzzles raw whiskey. Nonetheless, despite his given and surname, his opulent manners, his book-learning, and other "civilized" manifestations, Peabody has incredible energy; he is a forceful gogetter of a different sort, but no less industrious and aggressive than a mountain man. He is simply another variety of conqueror.

When he returns to Teal Eye once he has guided Peabody over the mountains to the Columbia — and after a harrowing ordeal trapped in the snow where he drinks the warm blood of a mountain goat he has just killed in a kind of symbolic communion with the only God he worships (the wilderness) — Boone discovers that his newborn son is blind. This defect undoubtedly harks back to the venereal disease Boone contracted in St. Louis and that Dick Summers treated — with dubious efficacy — by concocting a tea from niggerhead root, dipping a beaver pelt in the solution, and wrapping the pelt around the affected organ.

Needless to say, Boone is disappointed that he has sired a less than perfect child, one obviously ill-equipped to pursue the active life that has been the *summa bonum* of Boone's existence. So when the Indian named Bear asks the question, "Does the black eagle father the red hawk" — a not so cryptic way of implying that Jim Deakins (who has red hair) may be the father, rather than Boone (who has dark), can assuage any feelings of disappointment or guilt he may have. Jim's frequent praise of Teal Eye's beauty and virtues — innocent admiration only because Jim long ago has proven his friendship and loyalty to Boone — adds further fuel to Boone's suspicions. (As a later chapter will make clear, one of Boone's close relatives also boasted red hair.)

It is highly ironic, incidentally, that Bear would jump to such a conclusion, one that probably derives from his assumption that Boone — living like an Indian and adopting Indian customs — has routinely shared his wife with his close friend. But Boone has obviously accepted only those facets of Indian life that suit his needs, and rejected the rest. Once again, Guthrie is clearly stating that the two cultures can never be harmonized because of basic differences.

What the attempted marriage of the two produces will be imperfect or seriously defective. At any rate, in order to catch the two "lovers" in the act, Boone indicates that he is going away to hunt for a few days; when he doubles back as part of his plan, Jim is indeed embracing Teal Eye, but only to comfort her because she is acutely aware of her husband's disappointment with their baby. Tragically, Boone shoots Jim.

The theme of blindness has now run its pathetic course. Boone has been blind to his wife for failing to sense her devotion and for doubting her fidelity; blind to the futility of a white man trying to become an Indian; blind to his closest friend by mistrusting him; and, most importantly, blind to himself when it comes to his responsibility for fathering a blind child, for hastening the demise of the very lifestyle he has chosen for himself, and for obtuseness in not adequately understanding his own nature — particularly the blind anger that needlessly killed Jim, the same rash violence that broke Mose Napier's jaw and smashed his father's head. In fleeing to the West for escape, Boone has also fled, all of his life, from self-knowledge. Perhaps this is one of the dangers, as Lewis Atherton points out in his *The Cattle Kings* (a chronicle of a subsequent era in the history of the West), of leading an existence dedicated exclusively to practical action rather than contemplation.

In the short fifth and final section of the novel, Boone is returning down the Missouri, headed for home to see his sick mother, a journey that is now safe for him to make because Mose Napier has moved away and Boone's father has died. On the trip Boone is terribly moody and misanthropic: silent, sullen, and withdrawn. One gets the impression that he has grown too savage to participate any longer in normal, civilized, social intercourse. In part, too, he must be feeling confusion and grief over his own deeds. There are also the inescapable signs of change on all sides of the river: old forts being broken up for firewood, steamboats plying the waters, a dearth of Indians, numerous wagonloads of settlers headed west, and a plethora of farmers. Even Boone can't ignore what he "sees" for himself now. When he successfully triumphs over a braggart farmer during a fight, it is as if he needs to prove that a former mountain man is still superior to any nester. The victory, however, is a Pyrrhic one: the farmers have already won out over their

predecessors in the West.

The changes that have befallen Dick Summers are equally disheartening, for when Boone visits him he finds an old, wrinkled, henpecked man with slumped shoulders, rheumatism, and a belly that sags over his belt. The reunion is a poignant one, and important, for Boone at last ruefully confesses to his mentor that "It's all spiled" — the West they found, overcame, lived in, and loved is irrevocably gone.

At the end of the novel Boone heads for the West again; it is the only place he knows, however imperfect now and however altered.

Significantly, he is drunk — perhaps the only way that he dares to face reality. Black Sam was right when he said, at their parting after having gone down the Missouri together a few weeks before, "Goo-bye sad man." The forces of change along with Boone's own incredible blindness have destroyed every person, every thing, and every place that he has cherished. Even the indomitable mountain man, once in the vanguard of the advancing tide of westward movement across a frontier, soon finds himself a forlorn victim rather than a conqueror in a process larger even than his own beloved "Big Sky."

An Early Western Counterfeiter

by Ted N. Weissbuch

No one ever discovered his real name, but Ike Bullis was the name used by one of the most successful and expert of late nineteenth century western counterfeiters. Plying his trade in almost every city of importance in the country, Bullis' career, which reads like an exciting western novel, extended over fifteen years before he was captured with an accomplice, John Denny, in Los Angeles in 1894.

Bullis' story came to me from a former student, who like so many in my classes knew of my interest in the West and in numismatics. Many times over the years I had students tell me about their great-grandfather, a sheriff or marshal in the West. I recall only one student who admitted to an ancestor hanged for cattle and horse rustling. In any event, one day my former student brought in the old family scrapbook. From the many clippings, I was able to put together the following story about Ike Bullis.

Although little information concerning his background is available in the yellowed newspapers of the period, it is known that in 1893 Bullis operated extensively in Denver. When he had engulfed the city with his bogus coins, the authorities began moving in on him. Several members of his gang were arrested, but their wily leader escaped. Before Denver, Bullis was known to have flooded Pittsburgh, Chicago, and several other large cities with coinage of his own manufacture.

Today, obviously, the cost of counterfeiting even the nonsilver coins in circulation would exceed the cost involved in the efforts.

Ike Bullis' success was attributed largely to his plain, honest-looking features. Newspaper accounts described him as having the appearance of a farm laborer or factory worker. While operating in Pennsylvania, Bullis actually worked in the coal mines as a blind. In addition to his unassuming appearance, his dress was shabby; he wore an old slouch hat and coarse brogan shoes. The old newspaper engravings of Bullis show a stoop-shouldered man, about 45 years old, sporting an evenly trimmed sandy mustache. He was the head of more than a dozen counterfeiting gangs, yet few of his accomplices knew anything about him. Bullis managed to evade capture until he allowed his interest in the opposite sex to interfere with his operations. He eluded the cleverest detectives, including government secret agents, Pinkerton operatives, state and government officers, and county and city law enforcers. He might have continued doing so if he had not suddenly become interested in a shady lady in one of the Los Angeles saloons he used for passing his homemade coins.

Lavish gifts called attention to the master counterfeiter, and on the evening of February 3, 1894, as Bullis and his accomplice Denny strolled down Spring Street in what is now

NICKEL FIVE-CENT PIECES



This type five cent piece first appeared in 1883 without the word CENTS on the coins. Ike Bullis and others goldplated and passed them for five dollar gold pieces. Later in 1883, the word CENTS was added to the coin.

downtown Los Angeles, the notorious counterfeiter was collared. Without warning, a stranger came up from behind them and grabbed an arm of each man. The two were informed that they were under arrest, and without another word they were taken to the Los Angeles Police Station by their captor, Detective George Insley.

Parenthetically, Insley, my former student's relative, was a fascinating and colorful California lawman of the nineteenth century. He had been the Marshal of Santa Ana until he resigned his position to open a private detective agency in Los Angeles. For more than a week, all of the newspapers in Southern California carried stories praising Insley for his role in the capture of the elusive Ike Bullis and his accomplice.

Newspaper stories recount how, after the authorities in Denver had broken up and captured almost all of the members of Bullis's gang in Denver, the master counterfeiter, evading arrest, made his way to Los Angeles. His first move upon arrival was to find an assistant, someone to help him dispose of his homemade coinage. Searching for a suitable front, he found John Denny standing on a street corner in a shabby area inhabited by down-and-out bums and hoodlums. Judging by his appearance and the dull expression on his face, Bullis realized that Denny was wondering where his next meal was coming from. The counterfeiter struck up an acquaintance with Denny and learned his sad story. Denny told Bullis he had walked from

San Francisco with a companion in search of work. Although his friend had found a job at \$1.50 a day, Denny had not been as fortunate. Not wanting to live off his friend, he found himself drifting the streets, going from mission to flop house, always on the verge of starvation.

It was easy for Bullis to take advantage of Denny's misfortune; Bullis suggested that there was no necessity for starving to death. He gained the young man's confidence by degrees and induced Denny to throw in his lot with him. Bullis took Denny to the Montana Lodging House, located at 750 Upper Main Street and engaged a room there for both of them. It was in this room that Bullis informed his new friend-accomplice that he could make money that would pass and proceeded to demonstrate by turning out some spurious half-dollar pieces. The first one out of the die was handed to Denny, who hurried to a nearby restaurant and ate his first square meal in many days. Throwing the coin on the counter, Denny was relieved to find that it was accepted without suspicion. Elated at his success, he returned to Bullis, who from that time on kept him busily engaged in disposing of the coins he turned out.

Surprisingly, more is known about Denny than the more secretive Bullis. After his capture, the thirty year old man broke down under questioning and repeated his hard luck story to the authorities. He told of his long walk down from San Francisco and his failure to find a job. After leaving his friend he went to a mission, Kelly's Faith Home, located on First Street, where he lived with 300 other unemployed men, existing on a skimpy diet of soup and bread twice a day. Denny told the authorities that he had never done anything dishonest until he fell in with Bullis. Born in Chippewa County, Wisconsin, where his parents still resided, he had moved to Kilsap County, Washington in 1888. After holding a succession of farmhand jobs, he had drifted down to San Francisco, and from there to Los Angeles.

Capture of the two men came about after Bullis was recognized by one of Insley's detectives. This recognition, plus the expensive gifts lavished on his shady-lady friend were responsible for Bullis's downfall. Both men, until the moment of their arrest, had been almost constantly under surveillance. During the weeks they operated, the two had put an estimated ten thousand dollars of spurious coins, in various denominations,

into circulation in the Los Angeles area. The counterfeit money varied in denominations from five-dollar gold pieces to five-cent pieces. Immediately after they were captured, the room at the Montana House was searched and all the evidence necessary to insure convictions was found. Somewhat secluded in the boarding house, the second floor room had obviously been selected with the intention of carrying on Bullis's private minting activities.

Carefully hidden between the bedding was a complete counterfeiting outfit. Expanded operations later, it turned out, forced the counterfeiters to find an additional "mint" in the outdoors. Among other things, the searching officers found three brand new dies, evidently unused as yet. One of the dies, interestingly enough, was for the first type of 1883 Liberty Head nickel, without the word "Cents." As any numismatist can tell you, this famous "Racketeer Nickel" afforded easy game for counterfeiters, who electroplated them with gold "sweated" from genuine coins. Why Bullis used that particular "centless" 1883 nickel is not known, unless he intended gold-plating the counterfeits, thereby perpetrating a "double robbery." Officers also found packages of metal discs already alloyed with glass to give the coins a ringing sound, plaster of paris, chemicals, and various tools which had been and were for use in the manufacture of spurious coins. Later, at their trial, Mrs. A. Lohmeyer, who ran the run-down Montana House, stated that the men had moved in about two weeks before their arrest. They paid her fifty cents a week for the room. She testified that she was under the impression that they used their own blankets and slept on the floor. Only a week earlier, she had supplied them with a mattress, for which they paid an additional twenty-five cents. Mrs. Lohmeyer stated that she became suspicious of the two men when she noticed that they always went to their room by entering the building from the rear, on Alameda Street, by means of a narrow stairway which led to the main hallway. She had finally told Bullis and Denny that they could not go in and out that way and should use the front entrance.

When confronted with the evidence Denny immediately confessed his connection with Bullis, giving all the information he could about the counterfeiting activities. He said he was sorry for his crime, but was forced to it through ill circumstances. Denny realized,

he told his captors, he would be punished, but he hoped it would be a light sentence since he was willing to cooperate. Bullis, in the meantime, was kept in a separate cell and remained silent. On the morning following their arrest, Denny led officers to an isolated spot near the City Water Company, about five miles north of the city, near the banks of the Los Angeles River. Here, in a well-hidden camp among a group of willows, hidden from view by a high embankment on one side and the foothills on the other, he showed the officers where the metal was turned into bright, shining coins. He also exposed Bullis' whole *modus operandi*, so far as he had learned it during his brief experience as a counterfeiter. Bullis made his casts from plaster of paris, the die being made from a brand new coin. He used small wood blocks to make the frame in which the plaster cast was formed.

All this was done by Bullis's masterful counterfeiting hands. The metal he used, Denny explained, was a combination of antimony, tin, lead, bismuth and glass. (As previously mentioned, it is interesting to note that today, with the cost of the ingredients, counterfeiters would lose money if they attempted a similar operation. Except for altering coins to give them rare dates, counterfeiters today concentrate on making bogus bills.) The antimony in the mixture caused it to expand when it was poured into the mould, while the bismuth was added because of its adhesive power. The glass, as pointed out, gave the genuine sounding "ring" to the coins. Manufacture of the gold coins was done by electroplating with a solution of gold and cyanide of potassium.

Denny then led the officers to a spot where he dug up additional coins which had been buried for later passing. In the same cache was another counterfeiting outfit, consisting of chemicals, a china bowl, ladle, file, and several broken dies for half dollars. Denny said that these were dies which had been destroyed after they had worn out. The two men had flooded the Los Angeles area with their half dollars and so decided that it would be best to change to other denominations. Consequently, the new dies uncovered in the lodging house were made. It was thought that, with his admission of guilt and willingness to cooperate, Denny would turn state's evidence; however, as a contemporary reporter stated, "when put on the stand, Denny shut up like unto a clam in low

tide." At one point after overcoming his initial fright, he had even bragged to his captors that the two had stopped trimming the edges of the bogus coins when they discovered how readily they were accepted in restaurants and saloons. "I used them every day," Denny boasted, "and they went like corner lots in '87." The coins actually were well executed, and with the glass added, they sounded with an almost perfect ring.

Bullis, meanwhile, remained silently in his cell. The bogus money maker who had baffled the most skillful detectives for at least fifteen years, retained his quiet, unassuming manner and stared out the window of his cell. He was not informed of Denny's confession and seemed to think that he would be able to beat the rap when the case came up before the United States District Court in Los Angeles. When he was led out of his cell in the city jail for the trip to court, Bullis confronted Insley for the first time since the detective had arrested him. Insley greeted him kindly and asked how he was getting along. "As well as could be expected under the circumstances," Bullis coolly replied. His manner seemed unconcerned, and it was reported that he made the remark as reservedly as he conducted himself throughout the entire trial. At the initial hearing, Bullis denied all knowledge of counterfeiting, the manufacture of bogus coins and everything else, except the acquaintance of Denny.

When confronted with the knowledge that Denny had told all, the master counterfeiter realized that his chances for acquittal were gone. Both he and Denny pleaded guilty after listening to the evidence which Insley had so carefully collected. Bullis also became a bit more talkative. When he found that his Denver record was known, he acknowledged that he had left Denver in June and arrived in Los Angeles in mid-October. Yes, he admitted, he knew Reid, one of his accomplices who had been arrested in Denver. He volunteered the information that he had left Pennsylvania a year earlier and after traveling in the South had returned to Allegheny. From there, he and another accomplice moved on to Denver and other points west. Outwardly, the plain-looking counterfeiter showed no remorse over the seriousness of his predicament.

Almost four months to the day after their arrest by Detective Insley both Ike Bullis and John Denny were sentenced to five

years' hard labor at Folsom Prison. Their reward for competing with the government's jealously protected right to manufacture money was the stone quarry at Folsom.

Who Bullis really was, or what became of the two men after they served their sentences is not known. Except for the faded pages of the old newspapers in this student's family scrapbook, their very existence has been forgotten in the flow of western history. And as for the continuing career of Detective Insley, well, that's another story...



Corral Chips

Drawing upon his considerable knowledge of Western art, *Phil Kavinick* delivers a lecture at Saddleback College on "Canyons, Arroyos, and Oases: Desert Landscapes in Southern California, 1900-1985."... *Henry Welcome* has an article in the annual *Los Angeles Chinatown Souvenir Book*, which is issued by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to celebrate Chinese New Year. Welcome's contribution, titled "The Chinese Connection," is one of the magazine's two feature articles and is reprinted from *Gum Saan Journal* for December 1983 published by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.... One of our new Active Members, *Dick Logan*, serves as the cicerone for a colorful two-week tour of "Famous National Parks of the West" sponsored by the Los Angeles Community Services Educational Travel Program.... To mark their Centennial, the Historical Society of Southern California publishes *A Southern California Anthology*, edited by *Doyce Nunis* and featuring articles by *Branding Iron* Editor *Abe Hoffman*, Msgr. *Francis Weber*, and A.M. *Bob Blew*.... "The John Muir Life and

Legacy" was the topic at the 38th California History Institute held at the University of the Pacific when Ranger-Active *Bill Kimes* is lead-off speaker with a slide show entitled "Scotland Remembers John Muir." On hand to hear Kimes are *Dutch Holland* and C.M.'s *John Porter Bloom* and *Joseph Doctor*. . . . Before leaving for a summer's research and travel in Great Britain, *Doyce Nunis* lectures on the "California Missions in a Political, Economic, and Social Context" at a U.C.L.A. Extension program; "Junipero Serra — California Trailblazer: A Bicentennial Commemoration" at San Fernando Mission; and again for the University of California, Irvine Extension, at San Juan Capistrano. *Norman Neuerburg* is another participant on both of the latter programs speaking on "California Mission Art and Architecture." Seems like Norm is becoming quite an expert on the missions, for his work restoring the wall paintings at San Juan Capistrano is fittingly lauded in a *Los Angeles Times* article that notes how he "spent weeks examining the ruins of the Old Stone Church, checking tracings and photos and taking paint samples from the ancient walls, after carefully scraping away the accumulated dirt." . . . The spring issue of *Biblio-Cal Notes* contains articles by two members of the Los Angeles Corral: *Bill Hendricks* writes on "Corona Del Mar's Old English Inn," and *Dutch Holland* pens a work on "Descanso Gardens" assisted by his spouse Marion. . . . "Jedediah Smith in the San Gabriel Valley" is the topic for *Ray Wood's* talk for the San Dimas Westerners, headed by A.M. Sheriff *Ted Weissbuch* and C.M. *John Walgren*, who serves as Deputy Sheriff. . . . Msgr. *Francis Weber*, recently "elevated" to Active membership, has been on the lecture circuit too in recent months. He has addressed the Society of California Archivists, *Tres Dias de Campo* of the Los Angeles Historical Society, the 83rd Annual Convention of the Knights of Columbus, and the San Fernando Valley Historical Society. Accompanying Msgr. Weber to Santa Cruz Island for his annual offering of the Liturgy for the Feast of the Holy Cross are *Everett Hager* and *Tony Kroll*. . . . Spotted at San Juan Capistrano on a tour of the replica 1812 church are *John Urabec*, *Hugh Tolford*, *Norman Neuerburg*, *Everett Hager*, *Dutch Holland*, *Francis Weber*, and *Stanley Malora*. . . . *Walt Wheelock* attends the XXVI Arizona Historical Convention in Tucson with C.M. *Don Bufkin*

presiding. The highpoint is a field trip to Patagonia for a visit with Honorary Member *Art Woodward*. After a brief indisposition, Art is now as spry and as ornery as ever, and sends his greetings to the Corral. . . . Spending a delightfully informative week at the University of California, Santa Cruz, for a symposium on Charles Dickens is *Tony Lehman*. . . . Sheriff *Jerry Selmer*, his wife *Doris*, and their son C.M. *John Selmer* travel to Finland and the Soviet Union. Although their efforts to see the Russian collection of native American artifacts from the Pacific Northwest were rebuffed, they were rewarded with viewing other great art and ethnographic collections. . . . Finally, the Baja California Symposium XXIII was held at San Felipe with *Bill Hendricks* presiding. The notable highlight was a cruise to Roca Consang, where the group consumes quantities of delectable shrimp. Attending are *Lindy Currie*, *Glen Dawson*, *Walt Wheelock*, Ranger-Active *John Swingle*, and C.M.'s *Katie Ainsworth*, *Joe Northrop*, and *Ken Pauley*.

Monthly Roundup continued...

officer get himself into the situation in which Custer found himself on June 25, 1876?

Adams believes that Custer amassed a brilliant Civil War record but finds many examples in that record of unstable behavior that presage his actions on the Little Big Horn. In short, he was a lucky man whose time and luck ran out. While it lasted, his good fortune in being at the right place with the right people advanced his career despite the mistakes he made, and allowed him to make several comebacks. For example, his insubordinate behavior at one point resulted in his being suspended from military duty for a year. Reinstated in 1868 at the behest of General Sheridan, Custer achieved his highest rank of lieutenant colonel — general being a brevet (honorary) rank. It is a measure of Custer's personality that he preferred being called by his brevet rank.

Adams pointed out that the so-called Battle of the Washita was a white man's massacre of innocent Indians. Custer's luck held at the battle, since he had made no reconnaissance, did not know the whereabouts of some of his men, and conveniently overlooked the fate of

those troopers who were killed. Ever hungry for the spotlight, Custer gave intemperate testimony at the Belknap investigations in the spring of 1876, making unsupported charges and slandering innocent people. Released from Washington under dubious permission, Custer won his last command, thanks to General Terry, but he disobeyed instructions in bringing a reporter along on the Sioux expedition. Politically in the doghouse, Custer intended to win back lost glory by winning a major Indian battle.

Adams likened Custer's career to this point to grand opera, the buildup necessary to understand the finale. For Custer, the finale was an impetuous and poorly planned attack on the Sioux that ended in the death of Custer and more than 200 of his men. Ironically, thanks to the dedication of Elizabeth Custer and a coterie of admirers, Custer achieved far more glory in death than he would have had in just achieving a victory at the Little Big Horn.

MAY

Frank Anderson addressed the Corral on the career of Nelson A. Miles (1839-1924), prominent military leader in the late 19th century. Born in Boston into poverty, Miles found opportunity for a military career when the Civil War began. He recruited his own

Photograph by Frank Q. Newton



FRANK ANDERSON

company of Massachusetts volunteers, taking for himself the rank of lieutenant. Miles saw action throughout the Civil War, serving under General Oliver Howard, and showing his ability to command troops.

By war's end Miles was a major general, and he then joined the regular Army as a colonel. In the years that followed he played a major part in the Indian Wars. Miles met Crazy Horse, Spotted Tail, and other Sioux leaders, and in the late 1870s he and Howard led the campaign to round up Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce, finally forcing the surrender of the Indians. The Apache campaign followed, with Miles eventually compelling Geronimo to surrender. Miles then put down the Sioux resistance in 1890.

Anderson notes that Miles was a personable person at home, but abrupt with people he knew only slightly, a trait that did not improve with age. Eager for combat, Miles was also ambitious, overly so despite his successful rise in the military hierarchy. Sensitive to criticism, Miles proved a poor politician.

By 1898 Miles had reached the rank of commanding general of the Army, and he served as its leader in the Spanish-American War. Retired in 1903, Miles could look back on a successful career. Seventy-seven when the U.S. entered World War I, he offered to serve but was gently refused. He lived to age 85—and died while the National Anthem was being played during a military parade. He was buried with full honors at Arlington National Cemetery, the climax to an active and ambitious life that spanned the time from the Civil War to the Jazz Age.

Frank also presented a series of slides illustrating Miles' military career.

JUNE 1985 FANDANGO

The Pasadena Tournament of Roses headquarters, formerly the Wrigley mansion, served as the location for the Corral's annual Fandango celebration. The day was perfect in all respects: sunny but not hot, strolling musicians, and a fine dinner. Corral members and their families and friends toured the mansion and learned what the profits from chewing gum will purchase, as well as how the Tournament of Roses Association operates as a year-round organization. After the dinner Corral members saw a film on the history of the Rose

Parade. With an ideal location, large turnout, and plenty of opportunity to socialize, the 1985 Fandango will be remembered as one of the Corral's best.

JULY

The July meeting led off with Paul Bailey delivering a rousing tribute to Don Meadows who is departing Southern California to spend retirement time at Yuba City. Sheriff Jerry Selmer presented Don with a Certificate of Honorary Membership. Also recognized were new Active Members Dick Logan, Father Francis Weber, and Norman Neuerberg.

Photograph by Frank Q. Newton



DON MEADOWS AND PAUL BAILEY

The featured speaker of the evening, Father Pat McPolin, addressed the Corral on the history of the Dominguez family and the Dominguez Adobe, built in 1826 and one of the oldest extant buildings in Southern California. Juan Jose Dominguez was one of the soldiers who accompanied the Portola expedition in 1769. He served until 1782 and in 1784 was awarded the first rancho grant in Alta California. The Dominguez grant included 75,000 acres stretching from the Los Angeles River to Redondo Beach and taking in Palos Verdes, San Pedro, and Terminal Island. Dominguez' cattle thrived in the open space of the Los Angeles basin. Dominguez died in 1809, and his nephew Cristobal secured certification of the will in 1822 from newly independent Mexico. Cristobal's son Manuel took over the property in 1825 and

built a seven-room house the next year. He and his family occupied the home for the next fifty years.

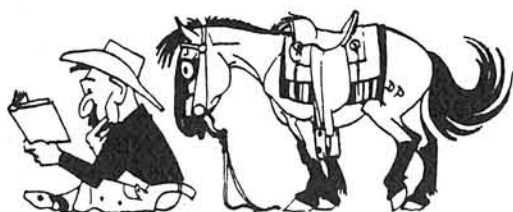
When California became part of the United States after the Mexican War, Manuel Dominguez attended the 1849 constitutional convention as a delegate. Despite the difficulties Californios had in validating their land titles, Dominguez successfully proved ownership of 45,000 acres — in a document running over 300 pages. Dominguez backed entrepreneur Phineas Banning in the development of Wilmington and the Los Angeles-San Pedro Railroad. Manuel died in 1881; his six daughters inherited the property, and his heirs' names are preserved in local businesses, street names, and landmarks.

As Catholics, the Dominguez family donated 17 acres to the Claretian Fathers for the Dominguez Seminary, founded in 1922. The property includes the Dominguez Adobe — on which oil was discovered six months after the papers were signed! The Dominguez property also enjoyed other claims to fame, including the first air meet in the U.S., in 1910. Some 176,000 people attended the ten-day air meet. Today the Dominguez Adobe Museum has a room commemorating this early accomplishment in aviation history. The Adobe is registered as California Historical Landmark No. 152 and is on the National Register of Historical Landmarks.

Photograph by Frank Q. Newton



FATHER PAT MCPOLIN



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL ...

Koenig, George. **BEYOND THIS PLACE THERE BE DRAGONS: *The routes of the Tragic Trek of the Death Valley 1849ers through Nevada, Death Valley, and to Southern California.*** Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1984. 263 pp. Illustrations, Maps, Appendices, Bibliography, Index. Cloth, \$29.50

This tragic trek of those Death Valley 1849ers has been an oft told tale. In fact, this book in review is George Koenig's third on this theme. His interest has been of such long duration he once wrote, "The members of the Death Valley 1849 party well deserve their honored niche in history... They were tested as few have been called upon — and triumphed."

One must go back to 1949 to discover whence came Koenig's fascination with this band of unfortunate people, and his insatiable curiosity as to the exact route they followed. That was the year of State Centennial Celebrations and a pageant was presented honoring the sad little group who trudged across that forbidding region to California. Since that time each year an encampment during November has been held by a group called Death Valley '49ers, Inc. Koenig served as a director of this organization which yearly commemorates the historic event, and was its president.

All the while he explored the terrain and read copiously. He was especially interested in the diaries of some of the weary gold seekers and found many discrepancies as to names, places, and even days. One member of the party, William Lewis Manly, wrote at an advanced age his recollections. Manly's *Death Valley in '49* contained many inconsistencies, and showed that his memory was not to be relied upon despite his being the hero who saved the desperate party and led

them to safety.

These gaps and variances were frustrating to Koenig. It was not until the lost journal of Louis Nusbaumer found its way to the Bancroft Library, and Koenig had the opportunity to translate and study the notes of this member of the German California Mining Company that he had fresh material with which to work.

Interweaving this new material with the other diaries Koenig produced the first book of his Death Valley series: *Valley of Salt, Memories of Wine*; a journal of Death Valley in 1849. Seven years later he prepared a somewhat capsulated version of this book he entitled *The Lost Death Valley Journal of Louis Nusbaumer*, a Death Valley '49er Inc. publication.

At last Koenig could begin his quest to locate and follow the original trail of those 1849 gold seekers. With such a vast array of source material he was able to do his historic sleuthing. He began his tracing of the practically obliterated trail "by foot, jeep, and camera." After years of "hoofing and huffing it" in the Southwest Death Valley and the labyrinthian Panamint canyons he has formed some ideas as to the location of important landmarks and springs, but he has carefully refrained from imposing these convictions upon the readers of the third book, *Beyond This Place There Be Dragons*, leaving them to form their own conclusions.

This work, so meticulously researched, is laden with explanatory footnotes in which Koenig has generously given credit to every authority he has quoted or relied upon. Rarely has he resorted to the use of such escape words as "apparently" or "obviously." Sure of his facts, after comparing statements of every member of the trek who left notes, he has charted every mile, day, hour, and almost minutes.

Replete with on the scene photographs, many taken by the author; a complete album of photographs of the trek participants; plus maps, Koenig has included a rich source of information in the appendices. In this material he includes a roster of names with correct spellings; a Death Valley chronology; the important spring locations; plus a selected bibliography.

Scrupulously researched, with as accurate a tracing of the trek as is possible, this book is worthy to be XIV of the *American Trails Series*.

Katherine Ainsworth

Wyatt, Victoria. *SHAPES OF THEIR THOUGHTS: Reflections of Culture Contact in Northwest Coast Indian Art*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, and Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, 1984. 80 pp. Paper, \$9.95

Prior to the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, the art and material culture of the Indians of the Northwest coast, was a sort of best kept secret of a handful of anthropologists, museum curators and private collectors. But at Seattle, thousands of visitors passing through the Fine Arts Pavilion were introduced to this exciting native American art ethic that is comparable with the elaborate, mystical works of bronze age Scandinavia, Celtic Ireland, or that of the stone age Maoris of New Zealand. This once in a lifetime show assembled by the then Director of the Washington State Museum, Dr. Erna Gunther, was titled *Northwest Coast Indian Art* and was the forerunner of a series of less ambitious exhibitions, as well as numerous publications addressing the subject, the most recent being the album format paperback, *Shapes of Their Thoughts*.

On receipt of the new work, I was immediately struck by the handsome cover design, but on taking a first cursory pass through the pages, was turned off by the physically awkward product and the "in design" or layout of the graphic elements. My initial reaction was "oh no, not another white space, is right space," high powered exhibition directory, whose content will include a handful of art shots and a body of text cranked off in the greased-tongue lengua franca of some supercilious curator. However, after overcoming my initial reluctance to start at the foreword, page 7, I found myself, in the tradition of a Northwest Coast Potlatch, eating crow.

Shapes is a bad news/good news product, and though I've commenced on a negative note, the good news, is truly good news. Victoria Wyatt's grasp of the interaction of the history, art and material culture of the tribes of the Northwest Coast, is a classic! Here in uncluttered, plain English, a sensitive observer, blessed with an orderly mind, addresses a complex subject, which at the conclusion of her exposition on page 70, leaves the reader with a concise wrap-up or roadmap of the creative processes and evaluation of the subject.

Wyatt's overview of the cultural responses

of these spectacular maritime Indians is one of those sleepers that should be required reading for anthropology students, dealers, collectors and aficionados. Though focused on the products of the Tlingit, Tsimshian, Haida, Kwakiutl, Salish and Makah, the process of change she describes, from time of contact to present, is almost universally applicable in the case of surviving/continuing art forms of any part of the primitive world. Further, despite the fact the Seattle show drew from collections throughout the world, including several contributions from the east coast, most pre-*Shapes* publications dwell on a resource inventory of artifacts in private and institutional collections located in Washington State, British Columbia, or the Smithsonian. *Shapes* on the other hand, except in two instances, departs from the old hat or standard fare, popular since Seattle. Here the illustrated subjects are principally of artifacts found in "Down East" collections, which are as fresh and exciting as those of the Seattle spectacular when first exhibited; and now back to the mechanical quandary.

Certain the camera ready art of this ineptly designed catalogue of the 1983/84 exhibition at Yale's Peabody museum of Natural History is a stepchild of an inter-institutional transaction, I hope the "Sooners" at the University of Oklahoma will carefully consider deepsinking the standing, cutesy, three-column, 9 point, body type layout, the myopic 7-point captions and high school yearbook treatment of the illustrations in favor of a professional format.

Redesigned for more practical handling, shelving and reading, this current 8½ x 11, album style, paperback whose editorial content, notes, references and index are first rate, would in either a standard paper, or cloth format, certainly emerge as a product worthy of the author, and one that would doubtless go through a number of reprintings.

Richard W. Cunningham

Warren, J. Benedict. *THE CONQUEST OF MICHUACAN: The Spanish Domination of the Tarascan Kingdom in Western Mexico, 1521-1530*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. 367 pp. Illustrations, Index, Cloth, \$27.50.

Michuacan, with its timbered hills, large lakes and isolated seashores, is one of the

most attractive states of Mexico. However, it is seldom visited, even now, as it was prior to the Conquest.

The Tarascans were probably the second strongest force in Mexico, surpassed only by that of the Aztecs. During this period the two tribes were continually waging wars, but these usually ended in standoffs, and the Aztecs were never able to subdue the stubborn Tarascans.

As Cortez fought inland to conquer that powerful nation, Moctezuma now asked for aid from his former foes, but only received lip service from the ruling *Cazonci*, the sickly Zuangua, who was to pass away in 1520. He was succeeded by his oldest son, Tzintzicha Tanganxoan, who then reigned until his execution, six years later. Warren's book is really limited to the story of this Cazonci's brief and unhappy reign.

Moctezuma, becoming desperate for aid, sent an embassy of ten to plead with Zuangua, of whose death he had not heard. Arriving at the capital of Michoacan, they demanded to be taken at once to meet Zuangua. The new Cazonci obliged by immediately dispatching the ten!

The new ruler appears to have been a shrewd operator, forming alliances with the ruling nobles when he could, and executing others. Cortez sent down governors and priests, and the Cazonci usually managed to get along with them, giving enough gold and silver to quiet them, though never enough gold to satisfy them. (The total treasure stored in Fort Knox would never have been enough.)

Cortez was becoming interested in the young Cazonci and repeatedly invited (ordered) him to come to Mexico City. Finally, in November, 1522, the Cazonci arrived at the capital and Cortez promptly took him into "protective custody."

But Cortez' time was running out, and after many commands from the Emperor, he departed for Spain in 1528. The office of President of the Audiencia was then established and Cortez' enemy, Nino de Guzman, appointed to that post. Guzman was probably the most vicious and depraved of the Spanish rulers, taking slaves from northeast to as far west as Sinaloa, where his nephew raided. (The Cazonci had held slaving to a minimum in Michoacan.) The Cazonci was brought to the capital and imprisoned and subjected to torture in an attempt to extract additional gold and silver, but the land had

been stripped of all treasure. Guzman heard rumors of additional treasure being held by the Chichimecas, and decided to raise an army to seek it out. He demanded Indian allies and took the Cazonci along on a march through Michoacan. The expedition was faring poorly, and Guzman seized the chief and accused him of a long list of crimes: withholding treasure, killing Spaniards, dancing in victims' skins, idol worship, sodomy, etc.

The Cazonci withstood torture for some time before "confessing." His foster brother, Don Pedro was likewise abused until he bore witness. On February 14, 1530, the last of the living Indian rulers was led into a plaza, tied to a stake and a large amount of wood piled around. Mercifully, he was probably garroted before the torch was applied.

This book is well written and is largely based on primary sources, especially the *Relacion de Michoacan*, compiled in 1540-41. It contains extensive notes (39 pp) and a seven page bibliography. It is not a work for the casual tourist, but would be invaluable for students who are interested in a side view of conquest of Mexico.

Walt Wheelock

Briefly Noted . . .

The University of New Mexico Press has issued a paperback printing of David Lavender's *The Southwest*, first published in 1980 in Harper & Row's *Regions of America* series. The price is \$12.95. . . The memoirs of Elaine Goodale Eastman, *Sister to the Sioux*, written in the late 1930s and edited and published in 1978, are now available in paperback from University of Nebraska Press in its Pioneer Heritage series, price \$5.95. . . Another memoir of a woman out west is Rose Pender's *A Lady's Experiences in the Wild West in 1883*, also from University of Nebraska Press. First published in 1888 and long out of print, the Bison paperback edition comes with a Foreword by A.B. Guthrie, Jr., and is priced at a modest \$4.95. The University of Nebraska Press has also issued a Bison paperback of Alvin Josephy, Jr., *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom*, first published in 1971 and now available for \$7.50. From the University of Arizona Press we have Dane Coolidge's *California Cowboys*, originally published in 1939 and now available in paperback for \$7.95. The book is a companion piece to Coolidge's *Arizona Cowboys*. . .