LOS ANGELES WESTERNERS CORRAL
The Branding Iron
J. GOODMAN

FALL 1990 LOS ANGELES CORRAL NUMBER 181

The "World Famous" Brown Derby restaurant opened in 1926, and was located at 3427 Wilshire Blvd., just across the street from the Ambassador Hotel. It sat at the northeast corner of Alexandria Street. — *Donald Duke Collection*

The Brown Derby

by Donald Duke

As the suburbs surrounding Hollywood began to accumulate numerous motion picture studios, this Southern California industry proved to be very instrumental in attracting a steady migration of stage actors and actresses from the East. These professionals, in the past, were accustomed to frequenting fancy restaurants following their performances. Hollywood, at the time, had very few, if any. Besides, the Hollywood locals found the practice of filming in the streets, and the loose habits of those new citizens from the East, too much to handle. Thus, with the opening of the Hollywood Hotel, in February 1903, at the northwest corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland, it was no surprise that it immediately became a focal point for social functions.

The Hollywood Hotel became a phenomenal success. Set in a garden-like setting, the stars were able to wine and dine luxuriously. Many a notable passed through its doors over the subsequent decades. The registry, with so many

(Continued on Page Three)

The Branding Iron

THE WESTERNERS

LOS ANGELES CORRAL

Published Quarterly in
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter

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THE BRANDING IRON solicits articles of 2,500 words or less, dealing with every phase of the Old West. Contributions from members and friends welcomed.

THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

by Abraham Hoffman

JULY MEETING

Dennis G. Casebier, the "King of the Mojave Road," presented the July program on that early transdesert wagon road, also known as the "Government Road."

He explained that the route was established by the Indians as a means of reaching the Pacific shoreline. Here they traded food for shells. The road did not take the most convenient way, but followed along the foothills where there was water approximately every 10 miles. When the Southern Pacific built east from Mojave to Needles, they took the line with the easiest grade. The SP built to connect with the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad on the Arizona side of the Colorado River. The route was planned as the 35th parallel railroad route or the fifth transcontinental railroad line. It is the present main line of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, traveling between Los Angeles and Chicago.

Many early explorers followed the road. Amiel Weeks Whipple and his Corps of Topographical Engineers, in search of railroad routes, followed the road. Jedediah Strong Smith and Edward Fitzgerald Beale travelled the route with camel caravans from the south to Fort Tejon.

In 1859 Fort Mojave was established on the banks of the Colorado River a few miles north of present day Needles. It was built as an outpost to help quell the Hualpai Indian War. For a time it was the largest army presence in the area, with nearly 500 men manning the fort. Once things settled down the facility was turned into an

(Continued on Page Seventeen)

famous personalities listed in it, was given to the Smithsonian when the hotel was torn down.

Los Angeles, itself, remained the cultural, financial, and business center of the city and, consequently, the social center. Nearly all the theatres and fine hotels were located in the downtown section of the city. Quite a few studios were situated along Sunset Boulevard, between Hollywood and Los Angeles. The newer hotels, such as the Alexandria and the Van Nuys, catered to the professional and social needs of the fledgling film community. Here, nightlife became brisk, and a variety of fine restaurants could be found in the hotels and surrounding area. The Alexandria, in particular, became a meeting place for producers, directors, agents, and movie stars. Located at Fifth and Spring streets since 1906, the hotel had the reputation of having hosted royalty and presidents of the United States, and, thus, it was a natural gathering spot for the rising aristocracy of the movie industry.

Herbert Somborn, who will later play an important part in this story, as the individual that established the Brown Derby, was introduced to Gloria Swanson while dining at the Alexandria. Soon afterwards they were married, although the marriage did not last very long.

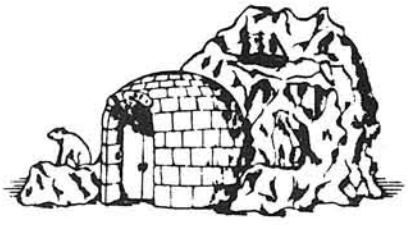
Numerous night spots of many kinds began opening up all over town, mainly to attract the film crowd. While I shall not attempt to go into detail on all of them, I will hit a few of the 'hot spots' in order to carry out this story. The Ship Cafe, built in 1905 on a pier at Alberty Kinney's fantasy-by-the-sea, Venice, was one of the important haunts. Named the "Cabrillo," it was fashioned after a Spanish galleon and served high-priced food and drink. For the exclusive clientele, it had a very posh, private salon on the second deck. The staff wore uniforms that resembled 16th century naval officers. Liquor was only available for the well-heeled.

In Santa Monica, below the bluffs, was the Sunset Inn. In time, this eclipsed the Ship Cafe or the Vernon Country Club, as 'the' popular hangout. It was later taken over by Mike Lyman. For a five-dollar cover charge, the entertainment and jokes by screenland's great entertainers was well worth the price. This charge was basically outrageous for the time, but was initially instituted to keep out the riff-raff.

Restaurants like Musso and Frank Grill and Henry's were popular star haunts in the 1920's. In December 1922, Eddie Brandstatter opened the Montmartre Club right in the heart of Hollywood on Hollywood Boulevard. For star attendance, it gave the Coconut Grove, at the Ambassador, a run for its money, but only until the Brown Derby appeared on the scene later in the decade. Although, the Montmartre was open in the evening and held dance contests, it was best known for its luncheon trade.

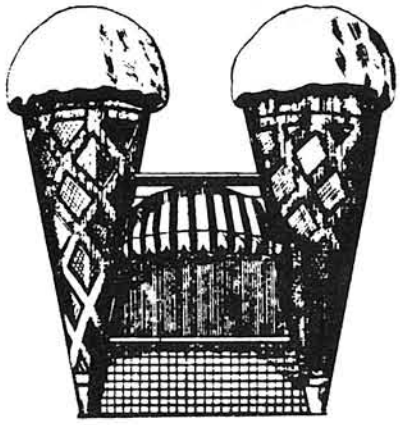
Occasionally, other clubs outside of Hollywood did generate some of the nighttime fanfare. On a stretch of Sunset Boulevard west of Hollywood, a number of restaurants and night spots developed and was called "The Strip." This was in County territory, and there, during prohibition, a bottle of booze was a sure thing. In fact, most of the night spots engaged in back room gambling.

On a drive around the Southland, during the late 1920's and early 1930's, you could find any number of oddball drive-up places where you might enjoy an evening's entertainment. Many of these establishments were constructed in the shape of something, such as a Pumpkin, a Coffee Pot, a Lighthouse, an Indian Pueblo, a Chili bowl,

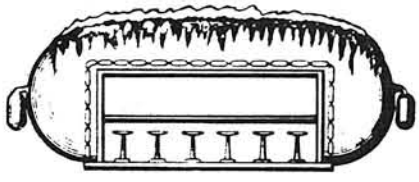


The "Igloo" was established on Beverly Boulevard, just east of Vermont. It was started by a John Henry Whitington. A stuffed polar bear sat on a rock out in front of the place.

The "Pig Cafe" was located on North Western Avenue near Sunset. It featured various kinds of barbeque meals. It was run by a Warren Lee.



The Currie Company, who were famous for their "Mile-Hi" ice cream cones, had many of these cone stands around Southern California in the 1930's and 1940's.



The famous "Hot Dog" stand was one of Glendale's hot spots. Established by Rex Payne, it was located on Brand Boulevard and stood there for years. It was strictly take-out or one could sit at a counter seat.

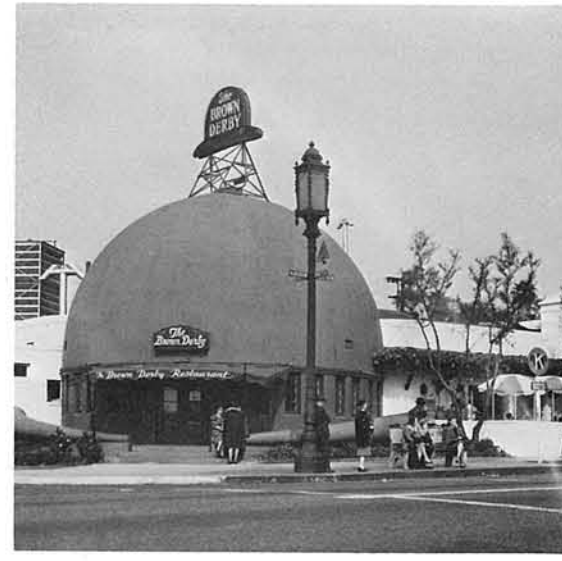
a Pig, or a Zeppelin. Here, light meals and snacks could be consumed while in the privacy of a roadster with a "rumble seat." There, with a personal flask, and a couple Haverford crystal glasses, one could have a fine dinner.

At Ptomaine Tommy's on North Broadway, just north of Chinatown in Lincoln Heights, you would find celebrities lined up for one of Tommy's famous creations—a burger patty smothered in chili beans and onions, that he listed on the menu as a "size." There was also Philippe's on Vigness, the originator of the French Dip sandwich. Another eatery was the White Spot at Wilshire and LaBrea, another grab-and-run place.

In spite of all the restaurants and clubs surrounding the film colony, there was still a group of people who found the food and nightlife not up to their 'standards.' The group, headed by Herbert Somborn, resolved to do something about it. They decided to put up a restaurant of their own. In association with Wilson Mizner and Jack Warner, they purchased the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Alexandria, opposite the Ambassador Hotel.

The Brown Derby opened in 1926, to the immense pleasure of nearly everyone in Hollywood. Somborn, a man of impeccable taste, became known as "a connoisseur of what the film elite desires." He made sure that everything that went into his restaurant was of the highest quality—from the finishing touches on his hamburgers, to the hiring of "good looking" gals as waitresses.

The Derby seated nearly 100 people, but despite its excellent reputation, the interior was quite plain. Leather booths hugged the walls and, in the center, a counter encircled a service area. Next to the entrance was the cashier, from whom you could obtain gum, cigars, or even a theatre ticket. Above each booth was a Derby light fixture. At Booth 50, near the door, Wilson Mizner held court. Mizner was a former comedian and wit from New York and Florida. Upon moving here, he had taken up residence across the street at the Ambassador Hotel. It was said that he was a millionaire, but rumor had it that Mizner had been implicated in a Florida real estate swindle, and just prior to the Depression, he hightailed it West. In any case, from Booth 50, he watched who came in and out of the Derby.



In keeping with the tradition of the time, the original Brown Derby was formed in the shape of a derby hat. — *Donald Duke Collection*

The Hollywood Brown Derby at 1628 North Vine Street, sat one-half block south of Hollywood Boulevard. It first opened on Valentine's Day 1929. — *Donald Duke Collection*

Posing as a man of wealth, he would lean on old friends in order to provide himself with gainful employment as a screen writer. He had a colossal gall, and this earned him the title "The Sage of Booth 50." In due course, his table became a veritable campground for screen writers.

How the Brown Derby actually got its name has as many versions as it had menus. It was probably derived from either the headgear worn by two men Mizner greatly admired—Bat Masterson and Alfred E. Smith—or from Somborn's belief that you could open a restaurant in an alley and call it anything, just as long as the food and service were good. I tend to believe the hat story, since it sort of followed the construction trend of the time in eating establishments, such as a hot dog stand in the shape of a giant hot dog in a bun, or an ice cream parlor with giant cones at each corner.

The Brown Derby caught on immediately. It edged out the Montmartre as a nighttime dining ritual. And, since it stayed open until 4:00 A.M., the leftovers from all over town would congregate there. It is part of the Brown Derby mystique, that everyone who was anyone in Hollywood, has eaten there. Its legend secure, the Derby became even more famous when it began showing up in films, and fan magazines. The Derby played a heavy role in *What Price Hollywood,* produced in 1932 and starred Constance Bennett. The waitresses' hooped skirts, starched to resemble derbies, were as famous as the corned beef hash, pot roast, and pie, which were the specialty of the house.

With such a following, it was not surprising that Somborn opened another Brown Derby. This time, in the heart of Hollywood, at 1628 North Vine Street, a half-block south of Hollywood Boulevard. The second Brown Derby was in an ordinary building. It opened on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1929, and had them standing in line, as no other restaurant in Hollywood ever did. It was the same food; a simple menu, made with the finest ingredients. Warner Brothers' architect, Carl Weyl, designed and rambling, Spanish-style building, specifically for the site.

The Hollywood Brown Derby accommodated twice as many customers as the original "Hat." In its early years, it included one large room which could comfortably seat a little over 200 diners. Low-sided booths were built along both walls, allowing for maximum vision between booths, so everyone could see just who was there. Although, the custom of paging customers and delivering a telephone to the table was started at the original "Hat," it reached a high art at the Hollywood Brown Derby. Each booth and table had a phone jack. So, instead of bringing the phone on a long cord, one was just plugged in at the table. A state-of-the-art in communications,

at that time.

Caricature artist Eddie Vitch began to make drawings of the famous visitors, and they were then hung on the Derby walls. This, he would do in exchange for meals and a liberal bar tab. Somborn, originally stuck the drawings up as is, but they became such classics that they were later matted and framed. Before long, the walls on both sides of the restaurant were covered with caricatures of the film greats. Once the walls were full, they would move them about to insure that a fallen star was not next to a "rising" one.

The booths became the favored spot for the stars and the elite. Eventually, it became necessary to reserve, exclusively, the booths on the north wall for the heavies and regular customers who attended the Derby on a daily basis. The commoners sat at the center tables, and, consequently, could watch the 'famous' chow down their lunch. Movie magazine editors had their reserved tables at a vantage point, so they were able to spot who came in, and what they ate. In fact, Louella Parsons achieved her professional status by watching stars like Tom Mix, in full western gear, slop down a bowl of bouillabaisse. She even went so far as to condemn the table manners of Wallace Berry, as he ate a dish of corned beef. She claimed that more was left on his chin than he put in his mouth.

Hollywood and Vine was just another corner, until the coming of the Hollywood Brown Derby. If the Vine Street parking lot next to the restaurant was full, it became necessary to park around the corner on Hollywood Boulevard, across from the Pantages Theatre. In this pre-valet parking era, the actors and actresses would then have to walk around the corner to the Derby, thus, originated the magazine and press comments, that you could always see celebrities at Hollywood and Vine.

The Hollywood Derby was, also, the embarkation point for the Friday-night-fights set, since the pugilistic events were held at the Hollywood Legion Stadium, a block east, or actually, it was directly behind the Derby's parking lot. At 8:00 P.M. on Friday evenings, the Derby would be nearly empty, as a throng of people would file through the parking lot, heading for the Stadium. However, many returned to the Derby later that evening to have an after-dinner drink or a piece of pie.

Herbert Somborn hired a gentleman named Robert H. Cobb to work at the Hollywood Brown Derby, where he served as a combination steward, buyer, cashier and occasional cook. It was he, who has been given credited for creating the first Cobb salad. After Somborn's death in 1934, Cobb became president of the Brown Derby Corporation. Wilson Mizner dropped out of the picture, and Jack Warner no longer had time to be bothered with a restaurant. It was not long before Cobb purchased the entire Brown Derby chain.

In 1927, the era of the "silent film" came to an end. Warner Brothers introduced Vitaphone, a sound process designed by Western Electric. Al Jolson would hail from the screen: "Say Ma, listen to this!" And, all of a sudden, things began to change at the studios. Studio heads no longer had to wine and dine independent financers, but, instead, became more dependent on the banks for their funds. It was at this time that star's salaries began to skyrocket, and the studio system fueled a giant film industry, that began to turn out countless productions for an insatiable audience. Suddenly, stars became the property of a particular studio. They were paid a flat salary, plus an extra amount for each film they made. A star could not work for any other studio unless a fee or an exchange was initiated by the studio making the request. Before long, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studio had a corner on the great performers. This is not to imply that other studios would not have a stable of actors and actresses, it just meant that MGM had the best of the lot.

As the greats of the silent era were dethroned, their caricatures were taken down from the walls of the Hollywood Brown Derby and quickly replaced by new budding stars. Those of the silent screen that were blessed with quality vocal cords, and by virtue of their stage training, seemed to luck out and remained on top of the heap.

Many of the mansions along Hollywood Boulevard, the Adams District, and those who built homes around the Los Angeles Country Club, abandoned them for the privacy of Beverly Hills. This caused the lifestyle of Hollywood to begin to change. No longer was it 'trendy' to wheel around town and be seen at the Brown Derby and other night spots. The Hay's Office was established to screen films, and when a scene

required that two stars be in bed together, one leg of each person had to be visible. Hollywood was going crazy.

When the stock market crashed on October 21, 1929, the new decade in Hollywood began to change. They hardly noticed the first couple of years of the Depression, as sound films were flooding the market. Everyone wanted to see and hear their favorite entertainer on the silver screen. Besides, with money so tight, what else was there to do, but to go and see a movie. A friend of mine, who was a Sound Engineer at Warner Brothers, said that he not only worked six days a week, but, also, many hours each day. All during the Depression, the studios were turning out musicals and "A" films, nearly one every two to three weeks. The "B" films, the mysteries and cowboy flicks, were turned out in a week or more. There were even "C" films, although I don't remember ever seeing one.

Hollywood continued to add new night spots, while others dropped by the wayside as they fell out of fashion or popularity. The Brown Derby, however, had clearly established itself as a solid lunch and entertainment center. Herbert Somborn attempted to branch out further, with the opening of two more Brown Derbys. The first was on a corner in Beverly Hills, and the other was in the Los Feliz area. Today's Michael's Los Feliz had formerly been a Brown Derby. The Beverly Hills location was in a plain storefront, and only the sign indicated that this was a Brown Derby. The Los Feliz location also contained a drive-in style of service on the west side of the structure.

In 1932, Eddie Brandstatter opened a new place on Hollywood Boulevard, which featured entertainment, called Sardi's. It was a first-class place. Sardi's stole a great deal of the evening business away from the Derby, just as the Derby had previously done, when it forced the closure of the Montmartre, ten years earlier. The two restaurants battled for the star's patronage, each vying for the other's glamorous and wealthy filmdom clientele.

As the Depression set in, many of the old 'standbys' of the rich and famous were finally closed and boarded up. While the studio system did pay each star a flat salary whether they worked or not, they were only able to earn more based on their popularity. So, as a result, those who were not working did not dine out or haunt the nightclubs. The famous Venice cafe, "The Ship," finally sank, along with many other clubs, such as the "Surf Club" and Vernon Country Club. For the luncheon set, the Derby appeared Depression proof. During this same period of time, there were other new restaurants which had become just as famous as the Derby, such as Victor Hugo's, the Biltmore Bowl, and the El Patio Ballroom, and all of these establishments seemed to be immune to any money woes.

Once prohibition ended, the Hollywood Brown Derby introduced its new cocktail lounge. By

The Beverly Hills Brown Derby was located at the northwest corner of Rodeo Drive and Wilshire Boulevard. — *Donald Duke Collection*

invitation only, it was opened on New Year's Eve and complimentary Tom & Jerry's were served. From then on, the cocktail lounge became a permanent fixture of all the Brown Derby restaurants.

In 1935, Sardi's put one over on the Derby. They instituted a nationwide broadcast from the restaurant. It was called Breakfast at Sardi's, with Tom Breneman. Tom and his Breakfast Club were an immediate sensation. It was a hit with tourists who came, not only, to watch the program, but hopefully to see the celebrities that would drop in from time to time to promote their latest film. It proved to be a huge plug for Sardi's! Actually, the Brown Derby did not even serve breakfast, but it was just the principle of the thing that bugged Herbert Somborn, that the stars would take the time to go to Sardi's just to talk with Tom Breneman.

When World War II was going on in earnest in 1942, Hollywood still remained a magical place for the world. The studios were working full bore, and many of them made training films for the services. But from 1943 until the close of the war, the pace was different. With the war's end in 1945, Hollywood and its social scene were on the verge of a dramatic change. Such changes would forever alter the film business and the lives of the stars. First off, many of the studios moved away from Hollywood, either to Culver City or the San Fernando Valley, where there was more room. Secondly, the contract star system came to an end. A star and agent now made their own deal, they were no longer the property of a given studio. Being on their own, the stars did not seem to roam as much as they used to. While clubs like the Mocambo, Ciro's, Earl Carroll's, Florentine Gardens, and the Coconut Grove were packed on Friday and Saturday nights, they were not all that busy during the week. Although, a booth at the Brown Derby still took some sort of connection for lunch, it was comparatively slow during the evening hours. Television was making its inroads, and there was fear in everyone's mind that it might wreck the studio system. Many of the studios began to lay off all but necessary personnel.

The Beverly Hills Brown Derby closed shortly after the war, but when the Los Feliz Brown Derby shut its doors, it became Michael's Los Feliz. The Hollywood Brown Derby also began to fall on hard times, as Hollywood was no longer the actual film capitol. While the major radio studios were on Sunset in downtown Hollywood, the television studios were located in Burbank, Culver City, and Fairfax and Beverly Boulevard. All the studios established in-house restaurants, and it was no longer economical to drive all the way to the "Hat," or Hollywood and Vine for a quick lunch. Hollywood Boulevard soon felt the impact and became very 'tacky.' The Broadway department store, at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, closed its doors, and Sardi's went bankrupt. Famous movie palaces, such as the Egyptian, Stanley Warner theatre, the Pantages, no longer showed first-run pictures. Sid Grauman's Chinese theatre, because of the signatures and footprints cast in cement, remained a popular spot for tourists. The locals, more and more, were staying home to watch an old movie on television.

In the early 1970's, the Hollywood Brown Derby finally had to close its doors. This left only the original Derby, or the "Hat." However, it was no longer a Hollywood hangout, but, instead, had become a high-class coffee house. Hollywood stars now preferred to gather in small, more intimate quarters, that were designed to insulate rather than exploit their presence. In due course, the "Hat" closed and was to be torn down for a high rise, until a group of Derby fans stepped in and were able to save it.

After a period of 20 years, the Brown Derby once again opened its doors in Pasadena, under new management. It had a bar and grill room, and a fancy restaurant. However, even with all this, it was not quite the same. The place was nicely furnished, but parking proved to be a big problem. The same people, also, reopened the Brown Derby at the famous corner of Hollywood and Vine, but both places lasted only two years. Today, the Brown Derby is but a memory of what was once Hollywood's 'good times.'

The Rocky Mountain Fur Company established Fort Hall, an American outpost in the disputed Oregon Territory. It was not far from the Snake River, and just north of present day Pocatello, Idaho.

The Far Side of the Ice Pond — and Beyond

Nathaniel J. Wyeth's 1834 Sojourn in the Fur Trade of the Far West

by Willis Blenkinsop

On July 18, 1833, at the fur trader's rendezvous on Green River, Nat Wyeth wrote: "There is here a great majority of Scoundrels." From past experience he knew what he was writing about, but he had no way of knowing what those capital-letter "S" scoundrels had in store for him the following year.

Much information on Wyeth's career as a successful ice dealer in the rural village of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is well documented as is his five-year adventure in Oregon and the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Of his physical features, not much appears to have been written except that he possessed a "robust constitution."[1] However, looking at a head-and-shoulders portrait of him, his high forehead, determined cleft chin and general bearing give the observer a feeling of quiet confidence within the man. Intelligence and poise are there too. His priceless records kept during the course of his two careers characterize him as accurately as could a master story-teller. Perhaps better.

Endowed with four generations of Yankee resourcefulness, he was quick to recognize the long but feasible risk and the courage of his convictions. In soliciting a loan from his uncle, he wrote:[2]

> ...I cannot divest myself of the opinion that I shall compete better with my fellow men in new and untried paths than in those to pursue which require only patience and attention.

He had also, in the past two years, discarded some of his previous notions about the Rocky Mountain fur trade and fur traders, the Mountain Men. From bitter experience, he had learned about most of the dirty tricks commonplace in the business: everything from petty thievery to commercial piracy of men and merchandise, bootlegging, bribery, hijacking, prostitution, extortion and murder.[3]

Even allowing for that, he never imagined that one day his initials would be carved on the forehead of one of his employees as the final touch-up to a job of retaliation.[4]

It was a far cry from the relative serenity and respectability of Cambridge where he had "done

Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth — a successful Cambridge ice merchant, and would-be fur trade entrepreneur. — *Denver Public Library*

well" for himself and his beloved wife, the former Elizabeth Jarvis Stone. There he had devised ingenious methods and tools for harvesting ice from Fresh Pond on the shore of which he lived, almost within the shadow of Harvard University. Demand for ice had been good. From his own and adjacent ponds, the ice soon found an extensive market in storage warehouses and ships in international trade.[5]

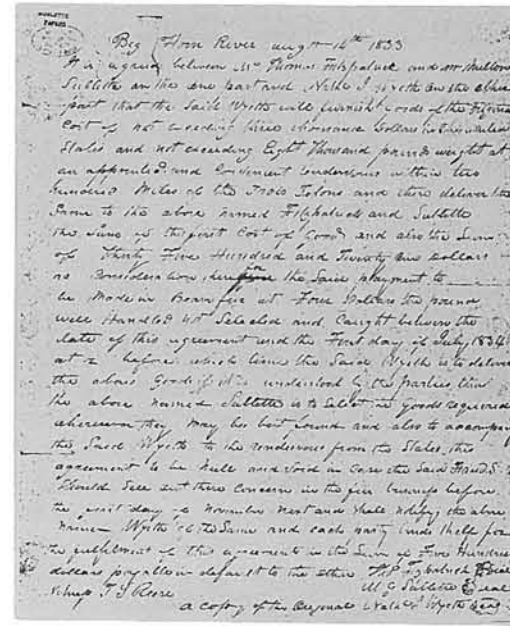
But now, in the town of Independence, Missouri, it *was* the following year—the portentous spring of 1834. Shaping up on the horizon were events and people that would have far-reaching effects, not only on and because of Nat Wyeth and the vitally important fur trade of the Far West, but for the whole course of what politicians would later coin "Manifest Destiny." And again this year the rendezvous was scheduled for Green River where supplies, equipment and trade goods were brought to be exchanged for beaver and other furs.

Independence, the "jumping off" place for most departures to the Far West, was a-buzz with beaver hunters, con men, merchants, entrepreneurs and bums. They hurried in and out of stores, warehouses, livestock corrals, blacksmith shops, grog shops and, as the laconic mountain man, James Clyman, had earlier dubbed them, "sinks of degregation."[6] Freight wagons loading for the Santa Fe trade, pack strings assembling and making ready for the rendezvous, a company of dragoons outfitting for the cavalry, Bonneville's ponderous wagon caravan and numerous others all turned the little town into a hive of activity. Overall, it was simply a race to see who could get underway first—who would be first to the rendezvous.

One of the first to get started was Nat Wyeth. Now only 32 years old but highly successful in his ice business, his restless energy demanded new challenges. He was in the right place to find them. And if more was needed, right behind him, outfitting a caravan of only about a third the size of Wyeth's, was the acknowledged master of wilderness travel, William L. (Bill) Sublette.

Nat Wyeth never specifically referred to Bill Sublette as one of the "Scoundrels," but he knew that Bill had served his apprenticeship in the mountain fur trade with William H. Ashley's elite brigades. For either greenhorn or veteran mountain man, no further certification was needed.

Bill stood six-foot-two, rangy, sandy hair and a complexion that bespoke years of battling for survival in a harsh land. A scar furrowed the left side of his face. Indians knew him as Cut Face.[7] His rivals in the fur trade knew him as a canny



Copy of the original contract between Wyeth and the Rocky Mountain Fur Co., made on the Bighorn River — August 14, 1833. — *Missouri Historical Society*

entrepreneur and a man who made friends easily but never let friendship or even family interfere with business.

In contrast to Bill Sublette's no-nonsense caravan, Nat was taking on unusually heavy burdens. Accompanying him this year were a friend, the botanist Thomas Nuttall, ornithologist John K. Townsend and the Reverend Jason Lee with his flock of Methodist missionaries. They would slow Nat's progress on the trail, but their presence presaged momentous events. Townsend, in addition to his scientific interests, proved to be a top-notch recorder. His description of Wyeth's departure is vivid:

> On the 28th of April [1834] at 10 o'clock in the morning, our caravan, consisting of seventy men, and two hundred horses began its march; Captain Wyeth and Milton Sublette [younger brother of Bill Sublette] took the lead, Mr. N(uttall) and myself rode beside them; then the men in double file, each leading with a heavy line, two horses heavily laden, and Captain Thing (Captain W's assistant) brought up the rear. The band of missionaries, with their horned cattle, rode along the flank... We were certainly a most merry and happy company...no anticipation of reverses could check the happy exuberance of our spirits.[8]

Ten days later on May 8th their exuberance was considerably dampened. Nat's business confidant, Milton Sublette, was forced to return to the settlements. Earlier he and Nat had made a supposedly secret agreement to carry trade goods and supplies to the rendezvous in head-on competition with Milton's brother, Bill. Now riding along with the caravan, Milton was suffering so acutely from a fungus growth on one of his legs that he could travel no farther. His departure cast a gloomy spell over the whole group. He had been admired for his amiable and friendly disposition in addition to his obvious mastery of wilderness and fur trade know-how.

As for "reverses," they didn't have long to wait.

On the following day, Monday, May 12th, one of the Reverend Jason Lee's cows was missing. While looking for the stray animal, the little search party observed a fresh trail. Bill Sublette had passed them in the night!

In a business where men fought and died for beaver skins, 25-year-old greenhorn John Townsend's unwitting humor appears to be that of an innocent abroad:

> They must have travelled very rapidly to overtake us so soon...It seems rather unfriendly, perhaps, to run by us in this furtive way, without even stopping to say good morning, but Sublette is attached to a rival company, and all strategems are deemed allowable when interest is concerned.[9]

Nat had learned the hard way about the "strategems" and knew that Bill would be driving hard to pass him. What he apparently didn't know was that Bill held the trump card: some of Bill's former friends and associates, now called the Rocky Mountain Fur Company which included James Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick and brother Milton, were heavily in debt to him. Worse, Bill had intercepted a letter revealing Milton's heretofore undisclosed agreement with Wyeth to deliver supplies and trade goods this year to Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Nat knew that Tom Fitzpatrick had remained in the mountains this year and would now be in the vicinity of the Green River site of this year's rendezvous. He immediately sent one of his men ahead with a note to Fitzpatrick:

> I...shall travell as fast as possible and have a sufficient equipment of goods for you according to contract....

He did "travell as fast as possible," and in spite of the slow-moving missionaries and his large caravan, kept within two days of Sublette, a monumental achievement for a Yankee ice merchant with only two years of fur trade savvy.

Then on June 1st, after 34 days on the trail and 665[10] miles out of Independence where the Laramie River empties into the Platte, Nat got more bad news. Bill had reduced the size of his pack train still further by dropping off 13 of his men, their horses and equipment. He was told that Bill intended to build a fort and trading post here to be named Fort William. The "William" never stuck. Indians and mountain men were geography and terrain oriented. "Laramie" it became and "Laramie" it has remained.

But the name of Bill's new trading post was the least of Nat's problems. Another name was

A scene at the site of what would later become Nathaniel Wyeth's Fort Hall. It was located midway between the British and American Fur companies.

becoming a burr under his saddle—Thomas Fitzpatrick. Tom (Broken Hand) Fitzpatrick was a mountain man's mountain man, as Irish as the Blarney Stone and tough as a buffalo bull. He was one of the more literate of his contemporaries and also one of the more scrupulous. But fur trade ethics being what they were, would Bill Sublette's leverage raise or lower his scruples? In ten days Nat would have his answer.

So after hearing of Bill's plans to further solidify his dominance of the mountain trade, Nat sent another message ahead to Fitzpatrick on June 9th saying he would:

> . . . continue to come on at a good rate . . . I wish you would defer making any contract for carrying home any surplus furs . . . or for a further supply of goods untill I come

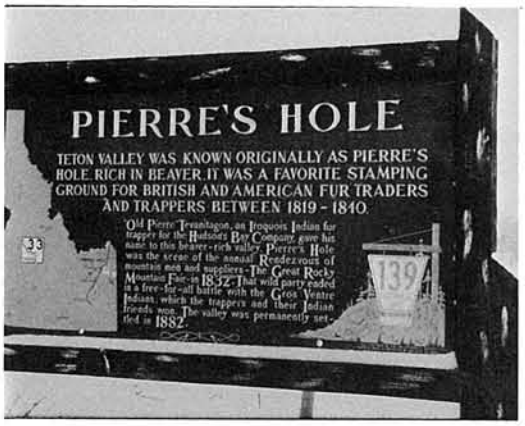
So with Bill now ahead of him, Nat did "continue to come on at a [very] good rate . . ." making 15 to 20 miles a day despite sand storms, poor grazing for the livestock and lame horses. At Independence Rock, the great "Register of the Desert," he inscribed his name as had many before him, not the least of which was Bill Sublette—*dated June 6th.* It seemed incredible, but Nat kept up the constant pressure for speed on through the broken lands of the Sweetwater River and at last he and his charges got their first glimpse of the snow-shrouded Wind River Mountains. A thrill to be sure, and a gratifying measure of progress.

But more problems kept cropping up. Try as he would, Nat couldn't escape the grim fact that he was trying to do everything with too little capital. He had already performed one miracle by raising the money for this expedition. It would be his last if he failed. And in the absence of Milton Sublette's supporting presence, there was no telling what those "Scoundrels," Fitzpatrick and his RMF partners, would do if Bill Sublette reached them first.

On then, across the plain known as South Pass, the almost imperceptible spine of the continent, the pass through which the United States would ultimately reach "the extreme end of the Great West."[11]

So Nat, now within two or three days of rendezvous, drove on through what all diarists have described as a hideous wasteland and camped about 25 miles above the confluence of the Big Sandy and Green River, the designated place for rendezvous. On June 17th, in the interest of faster travel, he decided to leave his caravan to go on alone in search of Fitzpatrick. He reached the junction of the two rivers on June 19th. There was no one there.

Desperate now, and virtually alone in this



This historical sign explains about the "Battle of Pierre's Hole" in which Nathaniel Wyeth participated.

empty expanse of sagebrush and sand, he could well have begun to see his precariously balanced plans disappearing in one of the wind devils zigzagging its crazy path across the plain. Twelve miles upstream on Green River he found Fitzpatrick. And with him was Bill Sublette.

With his two-day advantage, Bill had had time to foreclose on his debt with Rocky Mountain Fur Company. When Nat reached them they were out of business. Fitzpatrick and RMF had repudiated their contract. Nat wrote in his journal:

> ...and much to my astonishment the goods which I had contracted to bring up to them was refused by those honorable gentlemen.

"Astonished" Nat Wyeth could not have been. With all of his previous head-on confrontations with people and problems in the last two years of fur trade skullduggery, his journal entry was more likely a simple slip in choice of words, but the "gentlemen" sarcasm was no slip. And as might be expected, his reaction was swift and decisive. "Gentlemen," he was heard to say in the ensuing squabble, "I will roll a stone into your garden that you will never get out."[12] He proceeded forthwith to do exactly that.

The location of rendezvous 1834 on Ham's Fork of Black's Fork of the Green River was a mountain man's idea of paradise. It provided shelter from the ceaseless wind, pasture—lush and abundant—for thousands of horses, game for hundreds of trappers and Indians, clear running water and cottonwood trees.

The activity this year followed the usual pattern: a "Saturnalia,"[13] as Washington Irving has described it, of uninhibited drinking, wenching, horse racing, physical contests, renewal of old friendships, exchange of news a year of more old from the States, drunken brawls, constant gambling at the game of hand, prostitution and a murder or two to keep the event up to the standard of its nine predecessors.

But this year Nat noticed a difference. The first signs of a depression in the trade were evident. The fun and games lacked some of the abandon of '32 and '33. More raw alcohol was dispensed to Indians and trappers, fewer packs of fur were coming in. And back East, last but by no means least, the effects of John Jacob Astor's retirement from active participation in The American Fur Company, his vast fur trade empire, were beginning to ripple through the West. Next year the ripple would be a torrent.

So far as Nat Wyeth was concerned, one of the rendezvous' most remarkable aspects is that he not only kept his poise (though he had always been a ready and willing social drinker) but found time to write more than a dozen letters. He wrote to his wife, his parents, his lawyer and two very special ones to friends. One of them went to Francis Ermatinger, a formidable leader of Hudson's Bay Company fur brigades. The other went to his ailing friend and business associate, Milton Sublette. To three others he outlined what he hoped would be his ace in the hole for salvaging something of value from Rocky Mountain Fur company's repudiation of his contract and the ensuing destruction of his plans.

Wyeth's ace lay 150 miles westward across the tangled labyrinth of mountains where the vanguard of a new threat was beginning to challenge American trappers—a company infinitely more powerful than the late Rocky Mountain Fur Company, Sublette & Campbell or even Astor's American Fur Company. Huge but efficient, ruthless and crafty, it had controlled vast resources in Canada for more than a century and a half. Now it was infiltrating the Oregon Country. It was the Hudson's Bay Company. (HBC, abbreviated: "Here Before Christ" to American fur men.)

In his two previous years in the fur trade, Nat had become well acquainted with and well accepted by Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor, Dr. John McLoughlin whose extensive head-

quarters were at Vancouver near the mouth of the Columbia River. Now amid the ruin of what appeared to be his last chance, Nat decided to move into this relatively new and hopefully rewarding area, a sort of No-Man's Land in what today we call parts of the Northwest. John McLoughlin, Francis Ermatinger and other Hudson's Bay friends were also part of his plans. But Nat was not the only one making decisions of far-reaching import for the future of Oregon Country.

The Reverend Jason Lee, after viewing the revolting behavior of some of the Indians at the rendezvous while thoroughly debauched by traders' alcohol, was beginning to question his original intent to convert them to children of God.[14] A more decisive conversion within himself would overpower him as time went on. He gave orders to his followers on July 4th to pack up and go with Captain Wyeth to the Columbia.

Nat was ready, too, but with one difference. He gave his men "too much alcohol for peace and took a pretty hearty spree myself."[15] Thus they started the westward journey across the leg of the trail to Oregon that for many emigrants would later be a nightmare of hardship and disaster.

Never one to drown his business reverses in a bottle, Nat got his pack train consisting of 26 horses and mules and 41 men through the mountains as far as Soda Springs by July 8th. Old friends and scientists, Thomas Nuttall and John Townsend, were fascinated by the "lime which deposits and forms little hillocks of a yellowish colored stone...a warm spring which throws water with a jet...also peet beds which sometimes take fire...."

Then west by north to the waters of the Snake River. Somewhere on its bottom near the confluence of the Portneuf, Nat decided on the location for a trading post near today's Pocatello, Idaho. Here, in land between the British and American fur companies' sphere of influence and within easy reach of tribes that traded with both, he built Fort Hall, his "stone" in the garden of his RMF Company "gentlemen" competitors.

Construction was completed on August 6th. Wyeth and his men christened it with "a bale of liquor," named it in honor of the eldest of Wyeth's financial backers and honored it with a replica of the Stars & Stripes—"bleached sheeting, a little red flannel and a few blue patches." Thus Fort Hall began its tenuous life as an American outpost in the disputed Oregon Country.

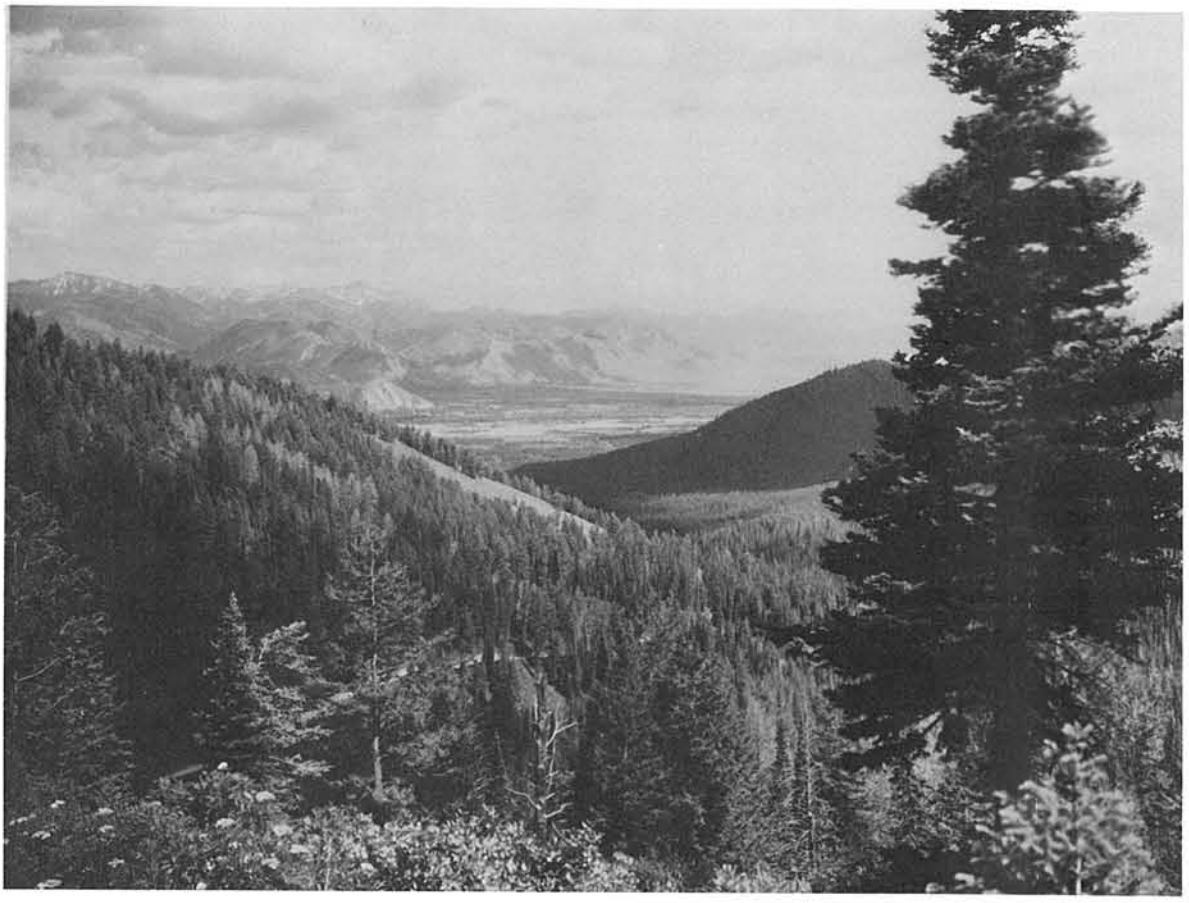
Before we go farther on this segment of the trail, we must backtrack briefly. From the first concept of his fur trade enterprise in 1831, Nat Wyeth had visualized an operation as vast in scope as it was logical to his energetic mind. It was similar to the one John Jacob Astor had tried and failed at 20 years earlier, but Nat felt he knew where and how Astor had failed in his Astoria adventure, and how he could circumvent those errors. He would send out trade goods and equipment by sea, establish a series of trading posts in the northwest fur country where goods could be stored and pelts collected. The ship could then discharge her cargo of trade goods and get her homeward lading of furs almost at once, thus greatly reducing the enormous cost of long and risky land transportation.[16]

Wyeth knew that Hudson's Bay Company had been operating in the region for some time, but despite his friendship with HBC factors he had no way of finding out just how well established the company was nor what a monolithic financial basis it had. Besides, he felt that just as Yankee sea captains and merchants had outmaneuvered the British and the Russians on the Pacific Coast, so would he prevail by one invention or another on his own. He had done it at Fresh Pond; he could do it now![17]

And something else: The Columbia and other rivers and streams of the Northwest were teeming with salmon which was selling in Boston for 14 dollars a barrel. The income from salmon could cover the entire cost of sea transport; the fur would be clear profit! On paper the plan seemed to be not only logical but lucrative, and in the winter of 1834 Nat had chartered the brig *May Dacre.* By early spring she was bound for the Columbia.

And back at Fort Hall Nat, with high hopes, was also bound for the Columbia to meet his ship. He left the fort on August 6th with a Mr. Evans in charge of eleven men there, one of whom was the literate and articulate Osborne Russell whose journal would later make a valuable contribution to the literature of the trade.

So onward across the infinite Snake River Plain with its black buttes in the distance, breathtaking chasms, alkali, lava and magnificent waterfalls, Nat took a brigade of 29 men



The Teton Range from the Snake River overlook. Located in Wyoming, near the Idaho state line, this spot is near the confluence of this mighty river. — *Grand Teton National Park*

through the ominous mountains, and starving times. His journal entry (with the help of numerous adjectives) tells the story more graphically than it can be paraphrased.

August 12th, 1934:

> I climbed up the clefts an[d] in passing over the snow had liked to have been killed in the following manner passing over some snow and on which the water was running and being afraid of caving in I missed my foothold in a slippery place and went gradually sliding down to a precipice but succeeded at last in averting my progress to destruction by catching the only stone which projected above the icy snow I however reached the summit and looked into another defile running E. like the one I came up. Got to the bottom again and found one of our two mules gone and being in want of meat packed the other...and walked barefoot to camp during the night through an infernal rough rocky prickly bruisy swampy woody hole.

By August 24th the feeling within this rigid and forceful brigade leader finally surfaced. Nat wrote:[18]

> This day at noon parted from Richardson and 8 men...there is something melancholy in parting with men with whom one has travelled so far in this uncertain country.

On September 2nd he was at Fort Walla Walla near where the river of that name enters the Columbia. There he received a warm welcome by Hudson's Bay Company factor, Pierre Pambrum. Pambrum's hospitality was generous as always with milk, bread, fresh vegetables and

servants to provide for their every need. But Thomas McKay, a HBC brigade leader, was conspicuously absent.

He was laying up more trouble for Nat Wyeth.

Remaining at Fort Walla Walla for only two days, Nat hurried down the Columbia in a canoe with three Indians. Gale-force wind and roaring white water made an unforgettable ordeal of the journey, but by constantly bailing the leaky canoe they at last reached Fort Vancouver at noon on September 14th.

Seeing his old and by now dear friend, Dr. John McLoughlin, must have been a great satisfaction to Nat, for despite the dispute over possession of the Oregon Country and its vast resources, their friendship never had and never would falter.

But in a tale of seemingly endless misfortune, Nat received yet another blow.

> Columbia River, Oct. 5th 1834
>
> Dear Wife
>
> I am here but have had no good luck. The vessell was struck by lightning on her way out and detained so long that the salmon season was past.[19]

Struck by lightning, hexed, jinxed or whatever, Nat had had it. Incredibly, there was more to come. Thomas McKay, whose absence had been noted at Fort Walla Walla, had trumped Wyeth's ace by establishing Fort Boise on the Snake River, well within the trading sphere of Nat's Fort Hall. Ruthless price cutting, incitation of Indians, bribery where it would work, piracy where it would not, and stripping the region of its fur-bearing animals became the order of the day.

McKay's establishment of HBC Fort Boise was the ultimate disaster for Nat Wyeth. His intended three-pronged penetration of the fur trade—first, his attempt to get into the transportation and supply end of the business by means of his contract with Rocky Mountain Fur Company, secondly his establishment of his Fort Hall and third, the salmon fishery—all now dismal failures.

The vagaries of man and nature sometimes conspire to defy all logic, and the explanation often gets lost in the indefinable element we call luck. Nat Wyeth had more than his share—all of it bad. In speaking of him, the irrepressible mountain man, Joe Meek, says, "Let him have better luck."[20] And he did, but not in the Rocky Mountain fur trade of 1834.

NOTES

[1]Cummings, Richard O., *American Ice Harvests,* p. 18. (Hereafter cited as Cummings.)

[2]Young, Frederick G., ed., *The Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth,* New York, 1973, p. 33. (Hereafter cited at Young.)

[3]Ibid., p. 137. Also, Devoto, Bernard, *Across the Wide Missouri,* Boston, 1947, p. 299.

[4]DeVoto, p. 261.

[5]Cummings.

[6]Morgan, Dale, *The West of William H. Ashley,* Denver, 1964, p. 23.

[7]Chittenden, Hiram, *A History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West,* Stanford, 1954, p. 254.

[8]Berry, Don, *A Majority of Scoundrels,* Harper & Bros. N.Y., p. 360. (Hereafter cited as Berry.)

[9]Ibid., p. 361.

[10]Devoto, Plate X.

[11]Leonard, Zenas, *Zenas Leonard Fur Trapper,* Norman, 1959, p. 89.

[12]Victor, Francis Fuller, *River of the West,* Hartford, 1870.

[13]Irving, Washington, *Astoria,* Philadelphia, 1837.

[14]Reader's Digest Assn., Story of the Great American West, Pleasantville, N.Y., p. 150.

[15]Young, p. 225.

[16]DeVoto, P. 63.

[17]Ibid., p. 63.

[18]Young, p. 230.

[19]Ibid., p. 144.

[20]Victor.

Indian school. The school lasted into the 1930's.

Through the medium of slides, Casebier showed what the Mojave Road looked like years ago, and what the same scenes look like today. He explained that in many places there were Indian petroglyphs on the rocks, especially in the Piute Creek region.

Prior to the turn of the century, the Army maintained several outposts along the Mojave Road as a means of protecting the Arizona Overland Mail from roving bands of Indians. Once the railroad was built the stage route was abandoned.

While the Mojave Road appears easy to follow, especially with a copy of Casebier's guidebook, it is strictly a 4-wheel drive kind of road. It should not be driven alone or with a regular car. Although the area seems like a wilderness, there are more than 10,000 head of cattle located in the million-mile region covered by this road. The cattle industry was established way back in 1860 and lives today.

Now retired, Casebier and his press occupy an old schoolhouse at Goffs. This is on the Santa Fe and about 30 miles north and west of Needles. While the Goff's schoolhouse is not actually on the Mojave Road itself, it is only a few miles to the north. Certainly a bit closer than Norco, the last location of his press. Casebier now spends most of his time in research, writing, fixing up the old schoolhouse, and talking with visitors.

AUGUST 1990 MEETING

Active Member Ed Harnagel spoke to the Corral on "The White Plague and the Southern California Population Boom." Harnagel argued that the "white plague," as tuberculosis was known, was far more serious a disease than historians have noted. People who had TB had a high death rate, the climate of California notwithstanding. California's growth included people who came out for their health, lured by promotional works such as *California of the South*. Estimates of health seekers coming west vary from 10 to 75 percent of the people who came to California, with the lower figure being far more probable.

Harnagel noted that the reason California's climate acquired its reputation for healthful air was because of two fallacies. The first of these was the error made in the 19th century that people had TB when actually they were suffering from a lesser ailment. The second fallacy was that when these "false TB victims" were cured, the credit went to the climate. Without X-rays or knowledge of the TB bacilli, 19th century doctors could easily make an incorrect diagnosis.

The end result, whether correct or not, was that Pasadena, Sierra Madre, and Ojai were all known as healthful places for white plague victims. Harnagel showed a number of slides featuring various TB sanitaria in their heyday. In these communities, a large number of the sanitaria did a thriving business. Being outdoors in the fresh air was considered therapeutic no matter how cold it was. Some sanitaria achieved quite a reputation. Dr. Walter C. Barlow opened a sanitarium at Chavez Ravine in 1902. Barlow, a former TB patient himself, was a local philanthropist, a supporter of the Southwest Museum. His contemporary, Dr. Walter Lindley, built a sanitarium at Idyllwild which was not a success; he is better remembered as the founder of the California Hospital. Many sanitaria offered tent villages, and patients kept their costs down by doing their own housekeeping.

By the 20th century the TB rate was going down, but bed space was up at the sanitaria, so their days were numbered. In 1944 streptomyacin, effective against TB, was developed. It was the first of the modern drugs used against the disease. By the 1950's the sanitaria were closing down, signaling the triumph over the white plague. No TB sanitaria are left in California today. But heart disease is up, and bypasses are now common operations. Harnagel speculated on the idea that some day such problems may go the way of tuberculosis.

Corral Chips

Norman Neuerberg spoke to those Corral members who journed on Amtrak to San Juan Capistrano for the tour of the Capistrano Mission Church.

The May 21, 1990 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* featured a special section "The Old West: The New View of Frontier Life." In an article entitled "Little House on the Prairie," *Martin Ridge* and *Ray Billington* were quoted quite a bit about early frontier life.

John R. Selmer, our Registrar of Marks & Brands, gave up the plush job he had at the City of Los Angeles Archives for one selling Kachina dolls. Anyone seeking a doll, call John.

Andrew Dagosta was in Wichita for a week June 18-25 showing his art of cowboys and Indians. Shortly after their arrival they were caught in a novel experience. Four twisters tore through Wichita, tore off roofs from homes, and tried to level the town. A hair raising experience to say the least.

Bill Escherich, who retired with nothing to do, is now a trustee of the Pasadena Historical Society. If that was not enough, he became a docent at the Huntington Library, taking blue-haired old ladies on tours. He is joined by *Ed Harnagel.*

Fifty-eight members, wives and guests took Amtrak from Los Angeles to San Juan Capistrano on Saturday April 21 to visit the new Capistrano Mission Church that Norman Neuerberg so handsomely decorated. A tour was given of the facility and Norman explained how he went about the decorations, the choice of design, colors, etc. Most of the work was completed by Norman single-handedly. One left with a great feeling of accomplishment and pride in Norman. I was impressed. Following an open lunch, members and friends returned to the quaint little depot for the fast return to Los Angeles. CM *Larry Arnold* and *Siegfried Demke* helped the engineer keep the train on the track for the run home.

Ernie Hovard recently returned from Santa Cruz Island, following four days at the Stanton Ranch and four days at Smugglers Ranch. It was a perfect opportunity to survey many of the prehistoric Chumash Indian sites. He also had a visit with Marla Daily who heads the Santa Cruz Island Foundation and found her a dedicated person in preserving the island's history. At Smugglers Ranch he had the opportunity to explore the deep canyons and beautiful beaches. At the Jeret Owens Ranch there is a hunting lodge for wild sheep and pigs. A true part of early California island ranching can be seen here.

Did anyone notice the new body on *Mike Torguson* at the *Fandango?* He has been on the Nutra-Systems plan and lost nearly 100 pounds. Rumor has it that the weight loss was between his ears. The date of the *Fandango* must have been a "free" day for dieting, as young Mike had two slices of Bavarian chocolate cake.

Doyce Nunis has been a busy man since our last issue. At a luncheon at Mission Santa Barbara, on May 5th, he was the recipient of the El Camino Historical Award. The citation reads: "The Province of St. Barbara recognizes your notable contribution to the history of the Franciscan Friars in the southwestern United States. For many years you have given of your time and expertise to the development of this history to benefit the understanding of the life and times of people of the Southwest."

Tom Andrews spoke to the Huntington Corral during May. His topic was "Heralds of Expansion: Overland Guide Books that Won the West—and Some that Lost the Emigrant." Guide book literature is unique to the Anglo-American experience according to Tom, who has made a study of it over a 100-year period, from the first

crossings of the Blue Ridge in the 1790's to the last climbs over Chilkoot Pass in the 1890's.

At a gala dinner held at the Huntington Library on June 27th, *Doyce Nunis* was installed as a "Fellow" of the Historical Society of Southern California. He becomes the second Corral member to be so honored. Glen Dawson was made a "Fellow" in 1987. Doyce has been editor of the *Quarterly* for over 25 years and certainly needs to be recognized.

CM *Tom Gildersleeve* had some 24 color plates published from his 35mm slides in a new book entitled *Railroads.* The volume is a spectacular coffee table book featuring spectacular color photographs, many full pages, of great steam locomotives, mostly in action.

Former sheriff and turncoat *Bob Clark* is already establishing himself in Washington state historical circles. He has just been elected to a three year term on the board of the Washington State Historical Society. That should add some prestige to the group.

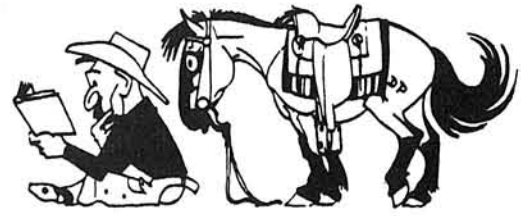
Retirement didn't last long for Associate *Dick Yale.* After spending 22 years as curator of the San Diego Union's Newspaper Museum, he hung up his hat on the hall tree for only a short time. Dick was commissioned by Old Town Trolley Tours of San Diego to write a layman's guide on San Diego's history. Yale is also a marathon man of sorts, driving up from the Silver Strand (San Diego) each month to attend the Corral meetings. That is a 225 mile round trip. Can anyone top that?

Former Sheriff of the San Francisco Corral, *Dean L. Mawdsley,* has just compiled *The America of Eric Sloan;* a Collectors Bibliography. It has just been published by the Connecticut Historical Commission. This 52 page, illustrated paperback is available from Doc. Mawdsley, 615 Chiltern Road, Hillsborough, Ca. 94010 for $10.00

Dr. Albert Shumate is the recipient of the Coke Wood Award from the Conference of California Historical Societies for 1990. Congratulations are certainly in order.

Along with 49 other teachers from around the nation, *Abe Hoffman* spent a muggy and buggy July in New Jersey with the American History Institute, sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. Site of the Institute was Princeton, so fighting "gnats" for a month was not all that bad. Josh spent his time chasing tadpoles and girls along the banks of the Millstone River.

With the retirement of San Gabriel's police chief, this left an opening in the ranks. *Rick Arnold* and seven others took the test to pass from Sergeant to Lieutenant. We now call him Lieutenant Rick.



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL ...

SEARCHLIGHT REMEMBERED, by Arda M. Haenszel. Norco: Tales of the Mojave Road Publishing Company, 1988. 111 pp. Illustrations, index. Cloth, $12.50 + CA tax.

A child's tales of a town and a family in the 1920's touches Searchlight from 1919 to 1922. The town survived a gold rush, descent into a ghost town nearly destitute, the depression, tourists, and today's gambling. One is grateful that Mrs. Haenszel photographed it in 1975; today's sight is quite different as one drives on the way to gambling at Laughlin. The Mojave Trail, Highway 95, from Las Vegas to Needles, runs through the town and tourists exclaim over its quaint appearance.

These miscellaneous tales do not explain Searchlight's existence, although they give a glimpse of people, town, and surroundings with ample rattlesnakes, burros, desert, and a few mines. Mrs. Haenszel tells these tales to the tickle of memory: picnics, home-made ice cream, childish games, school, riding burros, the spur of the Santa Fe, and a care-free three years. The only crises were those of birth, sickness and death, a minor train wreck, and some casualties from mining accidents. It is not the stuff of history but of nostalgia, wonderful to read and, in places, sheds some light on a brief span of childhood in a town that was not destined to die. The illustrations and photographs are the best of the book for they show a burro ride, the dust on mainstreet, and a doctor's house with its

home-made devices to endure the heat of the desert. It is fun to read but hardly something to enter into one's library.

Raymond E. Lindgren

MEDICINE MAN, by Owen Tully Stratton; edited by Owen S. Stratton. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989. 251 pp. Maps, Illustrations, Index, Cloth, $19.95. Available from University of Oklahoma Press, 1055 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73019.

Owen Stratton was an adventurous traveler born in Litchfield, Illinois in 1868. His early life was unremarkable except for the fact that his uncle was a professional gambler and that he was hired as an apprentice by a Litchfield druggist in his first year of high school.

This autobiographic manuscript, which his son has edited and clarified to create this volume, explores Stratton's early life and his travels to and from Litchfield to North Yakima, Washington and Alaska between 1889 and 1898. This includes one year of medical school in St. Louis and his marriage in 1896.

How better to be equipped to become a grafter in a medicine show? The excitement of the early Pacific Northwest is zestfully related in this book. Significant vignettes, presented in the style of Mark Twain, entice the reader further and further into this volume.

Between 1904 and 1906 Stratton returned to Medical School in St. Louis, and upon graduation returned to the Pacific Northwest. His practice years included interludes in Toppenish, Tacoma, Puyallup and Bridgeport, Washington. For a time he operated a houseboat hospital on the St. Joe River in Idaho. Later he was in Mansfield, Washington and Salmon, Idaho. He also was involved in practice in Great Falls, Montana and for a time was with the Tilden Health School in Denver, Colorado. In the late twenties he returned to Salmon, Idaho and in 1930 was elected to the Idaho Senate. In 1932 he lost in a primary election as a candidate for the United States Senate. Until his death he continued in practice in Salmon, Idaho.

It is difficult to access the impact of this delightful book. It provides a vivid insight into the world of the medicine man at the turn of the century. It also provides a vivid portrayal of the changes in orthodox medical practice from the time when very little could be done for many conditions up to our current era where more is available technologically than society can afford.

Historically this book rewards one with a treasure trove of little known facts and experiences, voiced in the first person by someone who was there. Philosophically this book presents an overview of the stresses and strains that existed in the morality of healers at a time when their resources were very poorly stocked. More than anything else the book is a delight to read because of its vibrant writing style and superb editorial management.

This is a great book!

Robert Stragnell, M.D.

WALLACE NEFF, 1895-1982: *The Romance of Regional Architecture,* edited by Andrea P.A. Belloli. San Marino: Huntington Library, 1989. 143 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. Softbound, $24.95. Available from Huntington Library, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino, CA 91108.

For a few short years in the 1920's California appeared to have found its ideal architectural style, that of old Spain, a style that seemed perfect for the Mediterranean climate the landscape of the western shore. One of its most distinguished practitioners was Wallace Neff, California born and European educated. Many of his works still grace the streets of Pasadena and San Marino, in particular, and appropriately enough the largest archive of his work finds a home in the Huntington Library which hosted an exhibition of his work this past summer. This volume was published to coincide with the display. Although it does include a catalogue of the exhibition, its main purpose is the publication of six essays concerning Neff and the architecture of his times.

The first essay by Alson Clark who recently authored a more ambitious study of the architect's work along with Neff's son, is entitled *Wallace Neff and the Culture of Los Angeles.* It describes Neff's early life and his training as an architect as well as his place within the Spanish Revival style in California. As an architect he was more a felicitous synthesizer than an innovator. His main concern was with pleasing his clientele, rather than making a bold personal

architectural statement. The preferred model among the numerous building types of Spanish architecture was the farmhouse with its informal composition so well-adapted to the growing informality of California life. Neff's version of this found favor with the wealthy older families of Pasadena and San Marino and with the movie stars and moguls of Beverly Hills. The tile roofs, white plaster walls, iron grilles, and colored tilework could easily be imitated and were by less talented designers and speculative builders but without his sense of composition.

In *Regionalism and Romance,* David Gebhard discusses the strongly romantic motivation of the fashion for period and exotic styles of architecture in the early decades of this century and ties it into the pervasiveness of the films which gave an interlude of escape to the viewer. In a like manner a house could permit one to escape to another era or another country—no matter how ludicrous that might be.

James F.O'Gorman, in *Neff and Neutra: Regionalism versus Internationalism,* discusses the rare, but prophetic, examples of the International Style in Southern California in the 1920's in contrast to the regionalist architecture with its emphasis on the Hispanic or Italian styles. The former were viewed as unwelcoming (my term) and thus were almost without impact at the time. No tract builder imitated them, though in subsequent decades they came to be considered the really significant works of the period in the region.

Jan Fiery Muntz, in *Bubbles for Defense,* discusses Neff's venture into low-cost and truly innovative design with buildings of concrete sprayed on chicken wire on top of deflatable baloons. Some of these houses were built for wartime use, but the idea never found real favor with the public, and few survive. Nonetheless they show Neff's capability as a true innovator.

Stefanos Polyzoides and Charles Calvo, in *Building, Drawing, Thinking/Wallace Neff* and the *Practice of American Eclecticism* in the 1920's, tell of the nature of designing in what was perhaps the last great age of architectural drawing and draughtsmanship and why it declined after that period.

A convenient list of Neff's projects, year by year, with locations for those who might wish to search them out is included. Curiously enough, remodeling or demolition was the fate of a higher percentage of his later works than his earlier ones. A check-list of the 48 items in the exhibition completes the text. All but one of these are in the collection of the Huntington. The nicely designed volume is well-illustrated with nearly 100 black and white photographs, while a color rendering made in 1925 of one of his houses in Beverly Hills perfectly catches the spirit of the era.

Norman Neuerburg

THE ART OF TOM LEA, compiled by Kathleen G. Herter. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989. 256 pp. Illustrations (color plates); Index. Cloth, $39.95. Available from Texas A&M University Press, Drawer C, College Station, TX 77843.

The Lone Star State has spawned in Tom Lea an artistic son whose independence and king sized talents match those of his mother state. From his West Texas beginnings in El Paso through his years as a correspondent in World War II, Lea developed a diversity which defies categorizing into any particular "style." Without benefit of formal college education Tom Lea made do with a stint at the Chicago Art Institute and the "school of hard knocks" which included a period of time in Florence.

The Art of Tom Lea is a well organized compilation of the man's work. This volume is ably introduced by Lea's fellow war correspondent, expert on Mexican history and superlative author, William Weber Johnson. This well produced book chronicles Lea's career from his student beginnings in Chicago and Santa Fe, in the 1920's and 1930's, through his experiences as a mural painter prior to World War II. As both a writer and illustrator he collaborated with Carl Herzog and J. Frank Dobie. The book ends with examples of his concentration as an easel painter in the later years.

The Art of Tom Lea is illustrated with hundreds of examples of his work in both black and white and color. Sturdily bound, this is a nicely laid out volume printed on paper which the publisher promises has an effective life of at least 300 years. That alone should be sufficient reason for most western art buffs to add it to their library.

Don Franklin

SIDEKICKS

by Abraham Hoffman

Ever since Sancho Panza sighed in resignation and accompanied Don Quixote in his quest for hostile windmills, picaresque heroes have needed someone to offer sage advice or comic relief. No area of popular entertainment, however, has relied on the loyal friend as much as the subcategory of Westerns aimed at a young audience, usually male between the ages of eight and eighty. These loyal friends were called "sidekicks," and no true Western hero traveled without one. Often bearded and in nondescript clothing—in contrast to the exaggerated costumes of some cowboy heroes—sidekicks employed a vast repertoire of euphemistic curses ("Dad-gum it!" seemed to be a favorite expletive), offered conservative and usually unnecessary advice without being asked for it ("Don't go into the cave, Roy!"), and needed rescuing almost as often as the school teacher or the rancher's daughter.

Sidekicks became a requisite for Western heroes as a result of their popularization in B-Western films, radio and television programs, and comic books. Their presence offered a respite from continuous action, an opportunity for horseplay while the villain put his nefarious plans into action. Some sidekicks became so popular that they achieved fame in their own right. There were actors who made careers out of playing sidekicks, providing the comic relief while their knight-errant friends went about the serious business of righting wrongs. George "Gabby" Hayes, Fuzzy Knight, Andy Clyde, Smiley Burnette, Pat Buttram, Leo Carrillo, and Andy Devine, among others, all enjoyed celebrity sidekick status. They acted as foils for the likes of Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, William Boyd (as Hopalong Cassidy), Buster Crabbe, and other Western stars, over lengthy periods of time and in several media.

Take Gabby Hayes, for example, possibly the quintessential sidekick. He must have looked old when he was young, for he always seemed to play the same cantankerous old codger from the thirties until his last roles in the early 1960s. At various times Hayes played Windy Holliday to Boyd's Hopalong, as Gabby to Roy Rogers, and as a pal to John Wayne in many of Wayne's early Western films. On rare occasions, as in *Man of Conquest*, the epic story of Sam Houston and the Texas Revolution, Hayes rose above sidekick status, but for most of his career he played the sidekick role. As Hoppy's friend Hayes even earned his own comic book, courtesy of Fawcett Publications, and (at least in the comics) he had a performing trick horse named Corker whose main talent was moving sideways on command.

Other actors came to sidekick roles later in their careers. Andy Devine had played a feature role in the classic film *Stagecoach,* and his gravelly voice and large belly made him a familiar character actor in the 1940s. In the early days of television Devine took the part of Jingles, a fictional friend to a highly fictionalized Wild Bill Hickok, played by Guy Madison. Devine's face for a time rivaled his handsome friend's on boxes of Kellogg's Sugar Corn Pops, as the cereal was labeled in a less consumer/health-conscious era.

Another character actor who evolved into an ongoing sidekick role was Leo Carrillo. Having played everyone from river pirates to Pancho Villa, Carrillo joined Duncan Renaldo as the hugely successful team of the Cisco Kid and Pancho. Playing to a young audience, Renaldo and Carrillo filmed the *Cisco Kid* television series, appeared in parades, and forever identified Cisco and Pancho as a happy-go-lucky pair of travelers encountering obstacles which they overcame by wit rather than violence. Ironically, the original Cisco Kid, as created by O. Henry in his 1907 short story "The Caballero's Way," was a cold-blooded killer who had no sidekick. It should also be noted that Carrillo's portrayal of Pancho followed an earlier sidekick, "Gordito," played by Chris-Pin Martin so offensively that Latin American film distributors threatened to boycott the Cisco Kid theatrical pictures unless the offending stereotype was changed.

Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, who between them defined a Western hero who appealed to juvenile audiences, followed the formula they had devised faithfully through movies, radio, television, and comics. The formula included

exaggerated Western clothing, a trick horse, musical ability, avoidance of romance, and either companions or sidekicks, sometimes both. Dale Evans was a companion, but Gabby Hayes was a sidekick for Roy.

The distinction between *companion* and *sidekick* merits notice. The line was not always clear, but it could be drawn if the relationship was one of dramatic support rather than buffoonery. Noah Beery, Jr., Edgar Buchanan, Dennis Weaver, and Buddy Ebsen played loyal companions, but they weren't sidekicks. Their roles were played on a more adult level, as in Weaver's portrayal of Chester in *Gunsmoke* or Ebsen's George Russell in the *Davy Crockett* episodes. Gene Autry often used Johnny Bond as a companion on his radio adventures, but his sidekicks were Smiley Burnette and Pat Buttram. For both Autry and Rogers, as well as the radio version of Red Ryder, radio offered more adult themes than the usual fare found at the Saturday matinees.

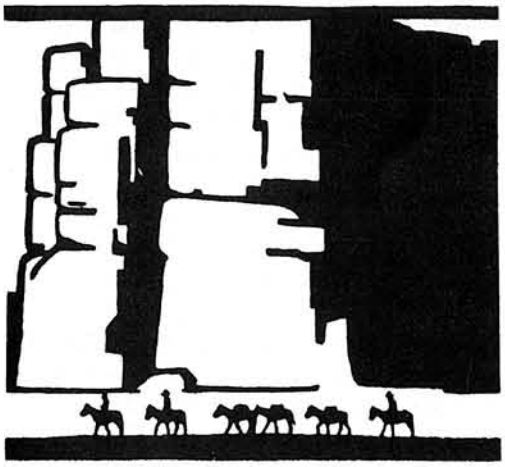
As to particular characters, Tonto seems an exception to the rule, since the Lone Ranger played to a young audience. Tonto's position was clearly delineated at the beginning of each radio program as the Lone Ranger's "faithful Indian companion." No buffoonery for Tonto, and radio actor John Todd and television's Tonto, Jay Silverheels, played the role straight. Little Beaver, as a young Indian adopted by Red Ryder, also seemed to be in a class by himself. But Red Ryder did have a sidekick, an old codger named Buckskin Blodgett, featured mainly on the radio series.

Some Western protagonists in their early incarnation had no sidekicks. Hopalong Cassidy, for example, enjoyed the company of his fellow Bar-20 ranch hands, but his rank was first among equals. The original Cisco Kid, as noted, needed no Pancho. But Wild Bill Hickok probably could have used a friend in that Deadwood saloon.

In some cases Western stars went beyond one sidekick to include a full retinue of friends. Gene Autrey's Melody Ranch stands out, with the Cass County Boys providing musical background for his radio show. Artist Fred Harman provided a family of sorts for his Red Ryder comic strip, including Aunt Duchess, owner of the Painted Valley Ranch, plus Little Beaver and Buckskin Blodgett. All of these characters appeared fairly regularly in the comic strip and on the radio, much less so in the movies. The Lone Ranger found his long-lost nephew, Dan Reid, and his horse Silver even obligingly sired a son, Victor, for Dan to ride. Britt Reid, the crime-fighting Green Hornet, was a modern-day descendant of Dan Reid. Tom Mix (actually Curly Bradley) enjoyed repartee with Sheriff Mike Shaw, and he invited every young radio listener to send in Ralston boxtops and become part of his Straight Shooters family. Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, though married in real life, maintained a platonic if unexplained friendship in films, radio, television, and comics. Of course, Roy never explained the incongruity of his elaborate Western wear in the 20th century. The Three Mesquiteers, including at one time or another Ray Corrigan, John Wayne, Raymond Hatton, and Max Terhune, enjoyed camaraderie; but no one, excepting possibly Terhune (the leading cowboy ventriloquist, if not the only one) might own up to sidekick rather than companion status.

The era of the sidekick in motion pictures and television ended with the arrival of the so-called "adult Western." Story lines became more complex, and the blurring of the line between good and evil made the traditional white hats vs. black hats obsolete. Western heroes either retired or matured with the changing Western concept. Roy Rogers started a franchise of roast beef sandwich outlets, Gene Autry bought radio and television stations and a baseball team, and Randolph Scott retired, as did Duncan Renaldo. Matt Dillon's relationship to Chester was Marshal to deputy, friends to be sure, but not for comic relief. Enter also the era of the "spaghetti" Western, a genre that not only could do without sidekicks, its heroes didn't even need names, as exemplified by Clint Eastwood in his films. Pat Buttram found new work on *Green Acres*. John Wayne, in most of the films made during his last decade as a star, made it a point to hire old friends, delighting *aficionados* who could note the presence of Bruce Cabot, Hank Worden, and other actors who had devoted their careers to the Western. But they weren't sidekicks.

As a postscript: sidekicks are not extinct. In many ways science-fiction films cater to the same young audience that attended those Saturday matinees; six-guns may have been traded in for ray-guns, but the plots seem suspiciously familiar. And who are C-3PO and R2D2 but Gabby Hayes and Smiley Burnette in a galaxy far away?



Rainbow Bridge

by Glen Dawson

As one gets older there is always the tendency to reminisce and to compare. I have been fortunate, in that, I was able to visit northern Arizona at different intervals over a period of years. In 1922 I was at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and in 1923 the North Rim. In 1924 I went with Harry James on one of his Coconino Camping Trips, visiting Oraibi, the Grand Canyon and Havasupai Canyon. On this trip, Don Perceval was the oldest boy, and even then he was always drawing pictures of Indians, and I happened to be the youngest.

In 1925, my father, Ernest Dawson, and I went on a Sierra Club scouting trip to Rainbow Bridge. He made the climb on Navajo Mountain — I went with the group leaving Rainbow Lodge on foot for Rainbow Bridge. The famous 'bridge' had been "discovered" in 1909 but it was still a very remote spot back in 1925. The route we took was via Red Bud Pass. On our first day there it rained extremely hard, causing both sides of the canyon to become a continuous waterfall, and when we crossed the stream on several occasions the water would be up to my waist. We camped in a cave-like place located a mile upstream from the largest of all natural bridges, arching to a height of 290 feet. A special feature of the visit was to explore around the base of the bridge and then climb all the way up to the top.

At this time in history, many of the Navajo Indians in the area still lived in hogans and used pack animals and horse and wagon for transportation. Roads were unmarked dirt tracks, and at the base of a sandstone cliff, I remember seeing mounds of Anasazi potsherds.

In 1939, before my wife Mary Helen and I were married, we went on a trip with a group of eleven Sierra Club members, camping in Monument Valley and hiking into the thirteenth century buildings at Betatakin and Keet Seel. It was 1988 before Mary Helen and I revisited Monument Valley at the spot where we had camped nearly 50 years before. It is now a Navajo Visitors Center and parking lot. Monument Valley now has a school, hospital, paved roads and the excellent Gouldings Motel. When I was there in 1925 and 1939, Kayenta was not much more than a trading post and now it is a city. Back in 1939 we were the only party to visit Betatakin that day. However, at the present time nearly 400 to 600 persons visit the Navajo National Monument each day, of which half are overseas tourists who speak German, Flemish, Swedish, French and other foreign languages.

One of the greatest changes to take place in the whole area was the formation of Lake Powell. The Glen Canyon Dam, which was constructed in the fifties, required the pouring of concrete around the clock, 365 days a year, for a period of three years. It was 1980 before Lake Powell was completely full for the first time — forming a lake with nearly 2,000 miles of shoreline.

Mary Helen and I stayed at the Wahweap Hotel and from there traveled by boat to Rainbow Bridge National Monument. Among the recreational activities to be enjoyed in the area is the rental of houseboats and rafts which are used to run the rapids of the nearby rivers. We chose to visit Rainbow Bridge aboard the *Nonnezoshi* — a boat built to ocean going standards. There were 70 passengers, and Hugh and Fritz were superb pilots, navigating us up and down the narrow, winding passages of Cathedral Canyon, as well as landing us within a quarter-mile of the 'bridge'. It is estimated that more people visit the Rainbow Bridge in one hour than had previously been there in an entire year before Lake Powell was formed. I could not, in my wildest dreams, have imagined back in 1925 that some 63 years later I would return by boat into this maze of sandstone canyons.