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Margery Wilson and William S. Hart in a scene from *The Return of Draw Egan*. Courtesy of *Winners of the West: The Sagebrush Heroes of the Silent Screen* by Kalton C. Lahue.

Western Film Stars of the Silent Movie Era

By Abraham Hoffman

From the beginning of the twentieth century until about 1930, people all over the world enjoyed what we incorrectly call "silent movies." Silent movies were never silent. Music always accompanied them, from full-scale orchestras in big-city theaters to tinkly pianos in small-town movie houses. Music set the mood, whatever it was exciting chase action or tender romantic scenes. Silent movies also had an international appeal, since the intertitles could be put into any language. For example, in the movie *The Shamrock Handicap*, directed by John Ford, a Jewish jockey says a prayer to his friend to win the race, and the intertitle has the prayer in Hebrew! A film from another country could be exhibited, and all that was needed was to put the intertitle into the language of the country where the film would be shown.

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EDITOR'S CORNER

The "Western" has a meaning, which does not require explanation, and of all story lines is the one most identified with this country. Foreigners, when asked what do they most identify with American culture, they think of the Western and cowboys and the "wild west." The existence of corrals such as ours throughout the world demonstrates a world-wide interest in the subject.

The two major articles in this issue deal with the Western movie, the single most enduring theme in the history of American films. From the silent era to the present, from the *Great Train Robbery* to the *Open Range*, the Western movie occupies center stage of the American myth.

A fascinating aspect of this story is that the time depicted in the Western movie is a very short period in American history from about l870-1890 in other words the era of the "Long Drive." If we look at the real history of that subject and that time period, there is not a lot to it. However, if we look at the legends associated with that era, we find a mountain of movies, televisions series, books and articles. Someone once said we have had a monumental feast on very little food. A good example of this is the legend of Wyatt Earp. This legend is a creation of a writer by the name of Stuart Lake in the 1930's and has been perpetuated over and over again in countless movies and television programs. The legend is obviously more interesting than the real man. "Print the legend" is good advice.

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From the beginning of the movie industry, Western films provided a fascinating source of entertainment for the film-going audience, not only in the United States but throughout the world. The West had hardly been won when motion pictures became a new recreational activity. The experiences of mining rushes, the rise and fall of the cattle industry, the Indian Wars, and outlaw depredations—as distinct from urban criminals—were well within the living memory of people who went to see movies. The movie industry even attracted real life Westerners, from working cowboys to aging ex-lawmen hoping to make a dollar or win some fame on the flickering images of the movie screen. Almost all of them were doomed to disappointment, most notably Wyatt Earp and Charlie Siringo, though the few who struck it rich, such as Tom Mix, could demonstrate that the pinnacle of success was not impossible, just very hard to reach.

It would not be practical in a brief article to mention every single actor who starred in Western films in the silent era. The best book on the subject, *Winners of the West: The Sagebrush Heroes of the Silent Screen,* by Kalton Lahue, features 38 people, all but two of them male, and the list is far from definitive. A survey of these actors shows a small number of superstars, a second rank of successful actors, and some who achieved a brief moment of fame but have since been forgotten. In a separate category are those who began their careers in the latter years of the silent era and rose to fame in the 1930s and beyond, a group that also includes actors whose star may have dimmed but still found work as character actors.

The first Western cowboy star was an Easterner named Max Aronson who happened to be at the right time in an unlikely right place. In 1903 Edwin S. Porter was filming *The Great Train Robbery* in the wilds of rural New Jersey. This film is generally recognized as the first American picture that told a story, and despite its location shooting, the film was a Western. Porter cast Aronson as one of the train robbers. Aronson lied about his ability to ride a horse, and when he fell off Porter demoted him to the rank of extra. Nonetheless, the acting bug had bitten Aronson. Changing his name to Gilbert M. Anderson, he worked for a time for William Selig's Vitagraph company but found Selig wasn't interested in making Westerns. Anderson teamed up with an old friend, George K. Spoor, and used their initials to create the Essanay Company, based in Chicago. In 1908 Anderson went out to California and set up a west coast studio for Essanay in the small town of Niles, not far from San Jose.

Now Anderson was in the right time at a likely right place. Niles offered excellent scenery for Westerns, and Anderson had enough creative talent to conceive of a central cowboy hero who could delight moviegoers with action and adventure. Failing to find a suitable actor, he cast himself, bought the film rights to a story by Peter B. Kyne, and adopted the story character's name as his own. Broncho Billy was born. To be sure, Anderson was no matinee idol. Heavy-set and far from handsome, he nevertheless commanded attention as audiences accepted him as a man of the West.

Anderson ground out one- and later two-reel movies at Niles from about 1908 to 1915. By his own estimate he made something like 375 films during that period, most of them featuring the Broncho Billy character. Typical titles were *Broncho Billy's Adventure, Broncho Billy and the Maid, The Bearded Bandit,* and *Broncho Billy and the Rustler's Child.* Anderson produced a Western a week for Essanay, working as producer, director, and actor. Many of his innovations were used by later actors and story writers, and credit for those ideas came to him belatedly or not at all. For example, Anderson created the idea of the "good-bad man," giving depth to Broncho Billy with a concept that William S. Hart would borrow and overuse. The filming pace was a hectic one that gave Anderson little time to worry about continuity other than presenting the Broncho Billy characters. So sometimes Billy gets killed one week, is back the next, an outlaw in one film, a lawman in another. He

wore ordinary clothing, as did the other actors in the films, which along with well-built stage sets created a realistic look that makes his films far more enduring than the flashy, elaborate costumes favored by Tom Mix and, later on, by Gene Autry and Roy Rogers.

Anderson's film career ended because of business problems. By 1915 bigger studios were putting out feature-length films, making his one or two-reelers obsolete, but he couldn't afford the financial risk of making a longer film. He sold out to his partner Spoor who tried to play it safe with the short films, reissuing the ones already made, decisions that proved to be bad business moves. Anderson worked as an independent producer for awhile and retired in 1923, forgotten by the industry until 1948 when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded him a special Oscar for his pioneering work. He even played a cameo role in the 1965 movie *The Bounty Killer* which unfortunately was a mediocre production. Anderson died in 1971.

In the 1950s the town of Niles was incorporated into the City of Fremont, and in 1998 the Niles Essanay Preservation Committee began the annual Niles Broncho Billy Film Festival, showing surviving Broncho Billy films along with other silent films mainly in 16 mm projection. Anderson should also be remembered for hiring an English comedian named Charlie Chaplin for a series of comedy films that earned Essanay a lot of money until another studio lured him away with a paycheck of $10,000 a week. Anderson couldn't compete with that, but in a way he didn't have to, for his own record of accomplishment makes him a major pioneer in Western filmmaking.

Around the same time that Essanay was running into difficulties, William S. Hart burst on the scene with overnight popularity. As with most overnight successes, Hart had worked as an actor for many years, touring with repertory companies or appearing on Broadway. Like Anderson, Hart was born in the East, and his Western expertise was self-taught, exaggerated, and manufactured. Hart's alleged "Western boyhood" was minimal at best as his father moved his family from one place to another in a variety of failed business ventures. As a stage actor Hart played a wide range of roles, from Shakespeare to spectacle, including Messala in *Ben-Hur,* Armand Duval in *Camille,* and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet.* He had also starred as Cash Hawkins in the stage version of the Western play *The Squaw Man,* but he was not invited to reprise the part when Cecil B. DeMille made the movie version in Los Angeles in 1913.

In fact, by 1913 Hart wasn't being invited to play much of anything. Stage roles were categorized, and many actors made life-long careers playing a certain type. But in 1913 Hart was almost fifty years old, a fact he hid from the public by shaving seven or eight years off his age when he had to give it. His credibility as a young leading man had already eroded, and in the chancy world of the stage sometimes even good reviews weren't enough to win a part in a new play. However, in 1913 Hart got lucky. He renewed his friendship with producer Thomas Ince, who was making films at his studio in Pacific Palisades. Ince hired Hart to play a starring role in several Westerns, the most important being *The Bargain* and *On the Night Stage.* These films were well received, critically as well as financially, and Hart went on to make 69 films in eleven years, most of them Westerns.

There is a certain irony in Hart's sudden rise to movie stardom. In his autobiography, published in 1929, Hart described how he visited a Cleveland, Ohio, movie house while on a theatrical tour. There he saw a Western movie. "It was awful!" he said. "Here were reproductions of the Old West being seriously presented to the public—in almost a burlesque manner—and they were successful." Hart decided then and there he could do better and that Western movies would be his new career. "I had been waiting for years for the right thing," he recalled, "and now the right thing had come!"

Hart did not state the title of the film or mention Broncho Billy Anderson, though it

seems likely it wasn't a Broncho Billy film. For all of Hart's retrospective claims for innovation in the accuracy of his own films, their look wasn't all that different from what Anderson was offering. His reunion with Ince gave Hart the break he needed, though Ince devilishly underpaid him during the term of the contract. Hart's authentic "look" of the Old West strongly resembled Anderson's in clothing and set design. Hart also refined the concept of the "good-bad" man, using the characterization in many—some critics then and now said too many—of his films.

Anderson and Hart differed in one crucial way. Hart stood over six feet tall, and his stage training gave him the ability to underplay his emotions. His stoic hero fit the desires of filmgoers who idolized him. Anderson did not look like a matinee idol, and he knew it. By 1915 Anderson was more involved with Essanay's productions and financial problems anyway.

"Two-Gun Bill," as his fans named him, became an immediate success. Almost all of the films Hart made in the first year of his movie career were two-reelers, with the notable exceptions of *The Bargain* and *On the Night Stage.* Of the latter film, the reviewer in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* observed that "Mr. Hart's is a face that photographs to a nicety. Small wonder, then, that he should be able to monopolize the action, for one follows his movements with the fascination that a snake has upon his feathered prey....It is a picture in which the character will persist after the story is forgotten."

Hart's "bad-good" man, to put the order of his behavior in a more accurate sequence, invariably started his Westerns as the head of an outlaw gang or a ne'er do well. In the obligatory saloon scene, Hart downed hard liquor and smoke hand-rolled cigarettes. He perfected the striking of a match with his thumbnail to a high art form, and it became a sort of trademark in his films. Fan magazines and feature articles admonished parents not to let their children try this at home, though one article did describe how to light the match, Hart style, more or less safely. The drinking, card playing, and smoking, not to mention the hanging out in saloons where it didn't take much imagination to figure out what the women there did for a living, did not sit well with a later movie hero. Gene Autry created a cowboy code of conduct that forbade such vices. Unfortunately, in doing so Autry also created the juvenile Western, a genre that dominated Western movies until the resurrection of the "adult" Western in the 1950s with its ambiguous morality issues where black and white could sometimes be gray. Hart in retirement said he had no use for Autry's corruption of the real West. In the film *Hell's Hinges,* Hart literally burn down a town and shoots some of its denizens when the bad guys kill the parson. This may be the most violent of Hart's films; it certainly was not intended for children.

If there was one level of morality that Hart would not compromise, it was shown in the transformation of Hart from the bad man into the protector of the good girl, or the bad girl who became a good one. One look at the parson's daughter or sister, or the schoolteacher, or any other female of a decent background, and Hart abandoned the evil old ways. Sometimes he got the girl at the end, sometimes he stepped aside and rode off into the desert so the girl would marry the decent man when Hart couldn't shake off his past. After more than fifty films, most of them Westerns, this theme had gone stale. Hart broke away from Ince around 1918 and formed his own production company. The money at last rolled in, along with offers to write Western stories. Hart had always wanted to be a writer, and in the early 1920s he wrote a series of boys' adventure stories. The time for this was available because in 1921 he retired from the screen.

Hart had the habit of proposing to the leading ladies in his films, and his off screen behavior was a lot friskier than his on-screen stern image would suggest. His costars turned down his marriage proposals, with one exception. Winibred Westover, his co-star in the film *John Petticoats,* accepted the marriage offer, and they were married on December 7, 1921, the day after Hart's 57th

birthday. The marriage proved an immediate disaster. Hart fudged his public age down to forty-nine; Westover was barely twenty-two. After six months of marriage, Westover, pregnant with Hart's only child, separated from him. They were divorced in 1927. Hart was also named in a spurious paternity suit in which he was labeled guilty before the facts were made public. The facts proved that his accuser was a mentally unstable woman who not only had never had any physical contact with Hart, the child she presented in court as Hart's wasn't even her own! Still, at a time when Fatty Arbuckle's career was being ruined, Wallace Reid was dead of a drug overdose, and director William Desmond Taylor was murdered, Hart found his public image tarnished. It is a measure of the time that Hart had to pay child support until such time as he won his case: guilty until proven innocent.

Hart dealt with his personal problems by deciding to make a comeback in films, both to reestablish his moral character with the public and to show he could still make movies. Whatever the success of his first goal, the second didn't work out. His last film, *Tumbleweeds,* shot in 1925, cost him financially and compelled him to sue Paramount for its poor distribution of the movie. Hart didn't win a judgment until 1938. By then he was long retired to his home in Newhall, writing books, making occasional appearances on radio programs, and working sometimes as a technical adviser on Westerns, as he did with Johnny Mack Brown in the 1930 version of *Billy the Kid.* When Hart died in 1946 he left his home to the County of Los Angeles as a public park.

Even as Hart's star faded, Tom Mix's rapidly rose. Born in Pennsylvania in 1880, at age eighteen Mix joined in the general enthusiasm for the Spanish-American War, and, if you want to print the legend, later claimed he took part in the Philippine Insurrection and the Boxer Rebellion. This was followed by service as a deputy U.S. marshal, Texas Ranger, and all-around soldier of fortune. His film career may have begun in 1910 with the Selig Company which filmed scenes at Mix's ranch and released the movie under the title *Ranch Life in the Great Southwest.* However, Mix had already appeared in eight other films. When the Mexican Revolution broke out, Mix went to Mexico to take part in it; at least that's the way Mix remembered it.

The actual facts about Mix are best shown in his work in the film industry. Mix is credited with appearing in 305 films made between 1909 and 1935, of which all but about two dozen were silent films, and at least two-thirds were done before 1917, many of them one- or two-reelers. In addition to his movie roles, Mix directed 109 films, wrote the screenplays for 75, and produced 48. In some films he filled all four jobs. The earliest films have little to distinguish Mix from other actors in Westerns, but stardom came when he moved from Selig to Fox Studios in 1917.

Mix saw his primary purpose on screen as providing maximum entertainment for the audience. To Mix, this meant virtually continuous action, imaginative scenarios, and demonstrating an infectious enthusiasm for the action in which he took part. In the earlier Mix films the actor wore everyday work clothes, but as his star grew brighter his clothes became more stylized, reaching a point where he wore a costume rather than clothing.

Mix departed from Hart in areas other than haberdashery as well. He had no interest in the "good-bad" man concept. Instead, Mix played a hero, and as such he made a much more direct appeal to young people, especially boys, for their fan loyalty. In his later films he cut down on the gambling and drinking scenes, and even held off killing the bad guys unless it was absolutely necessary. Mix's films, in contrast to Hart's rather static pictures, were full of non-stop action. The profitability of his films brought Mix good directors, among them Lambert Hillyer, who had directed many of Hart's best films. Excellent camera work clearly showed that Mix did many of his own stunts.

In 1926 Mix went on location in Colorado to film *The Great K and A Train*

Robbery, shooting scenes in the Royal Gorge of the Colorado River. Beyond the spectacular scenery was so much action and stunt work that the improbabilities of the plot didn't seem to matter. Mix jumped on the train, off the train, chased it on horseback, was chased by the bad guys, chased the bad guys, and finally triumphed over evil. For all the action, actual violence was at a minimum, and it is a credit to Mix and the camera work that you don't realize this until you think about the film afterward. Mix's imagination knew no bounds. Being a cowboy actor didn't stop him from starring in such pictures as *The Roman Cowboy, Tom Mix in Arabia,* and *Dick Turpin.* Married five times, Mix enjoyed life, spending money faster than he made it—and at the peak of his career he was earning $17,000 a week. His convertible automobile had longhorns for a hood ornament.

When sound films ended the silent era, Mix was close to fifty years old and tired of doing his own stunts, not to mention the dangers of doing them. He made a few sound films but found it easier to license his name to such shows as the Tom Mix Wild West Circus. In 1933 he began the Tom Mix radio program on NBC, sponsored by Ralston Cereals, but he never starred on the show himself. Radio acting didn't pay enough money. Other actors played the Mix role. There was also income from comic books and toys. After Mix died in an automobile accident in 1940, the radio show ran another ten years, perhaps in a way proving you can take it with you. As late as the 1980s Ralston was putting a little Tom Mix comic book into its cereal boxes.

If Anderson, Hart, and Mix were the Western superstars of the silent film era, they led a posse of successful actors, many of whom continued to appear in films after sound came in, usually in character roles. At the top of the list I would place Harry Carey, a fine actor whose career included silent and sound films, the stage, screenplay writing, and producing. Although a younger generation probably best remembers him for character roles in such classic films as *Red River,*

Hoot Gibson in the late 1920s. Courtesy of *Winners of the West: The Sagebrush Heroes of the Silent Screen* by Kalton C. Lahue.

Duel in the Sun, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,* between 1909 and 1928 he appeared in no less than 166 silent films, playing Western heroes and villains alike. Born in 1878, he was nearly forty when he joined Universal Studios in 1915. His co-star in the film, Olive Fuller, was almost twenty years younger, but the love bug bit, and their marriage was an enduring one. Their son, Harry Carey Jr., became a noted actor in his own right, appearing in many Western films with John Wayne. Carey played Trader Horn in the film of the same name, achieving some distinction for doing so since it was the first Hollywood film done on location in Africa. He did the film on condition that Olive accompany him, and she had a small role in the picture.

As for his silent film career, Carey has been compared to Hart for the realistic settings of their pictures, but Carey brought more warmth to his roles, and a touch of humor, than Hart did. Carey's co-star in the 1919 film *Marked Men* was Winifred Westover, who married Hart two years later. Hart's estate was in Newhall; Carey owned a

ranch in San Francisquito Canyon. Fortunately, the family wasn't there when the St. Francis Dam collapsed on March 12, 1928, and roared down the canyon, taking Carey's ranch buildings and all the livestock with it. Carey was wiped out financially, but he was alive to do *Trader Horn,* his first sound film.

Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, and Buck Jones were more popular screen heroes in the 1920s than Carey, but Carey's career lasted longer. In his fifties, Carey did well as a character actor, continuing until poor health forced his retirement in 1946. He died a year later. His last three films—*Red River, The Babe Ruth Story,* and *So Dear to My Heart,* appeared posthumously; Carey worked until the end, and a little beyond that.

Hoot Gibson was only seventy years old when he died in 1962, but with the exception of Bob Steele, Hoot was the last of the silent screen heroes. Steele made fewer than twenty silent films; Hoot appeared in more than 150. As a young man, Ed Gibson worked for the Owl Drug Company, and the story is that he got the name "Hoot" from his employment. He came to Hollywood following work as a rodeo cowboy. Hoot started as a horse wrangler and stuntman, doubling for Harry Carey, falling off horses, sometimes playing an Indian, sometimes a cavalryman or cowboy. Extras playing cowboys earned $5, extras playing Indians $2.50—not because of racial prejudice but because filmmakers figured it was easier to fall off bareback than from a saddle.

In 1917 Hoot, at age twenty-five, joined the Army. Returning to Hollywood after the war, he starred in a series of two-reelers for a couple of years, then moved to feature films at Universal in 1921. Few of his films are particularly memorable, as he mainly appeared in formula Westerns such as *Action* and *The Flaming Frontier.* Like Mix, Gibson didn't mind departing from the formula to unusual locales, as shown in *The Thrill Chaser,* or in chronological anachronisms such as *The Winged Horseman* where the cowboy flew an airplane.

Gibson made an easy transfer to sound films, but mainly in B or even Grade C Westerns, appealing to a juvenile audience. Still, he could be counted on for several films a year, and from 1943 to 1946 he played a character named Hoot Gibson in almost all his films. The budgets for these movies, unfortunately, grew smaller and smaller, and the pictures suffered in quality. Hoot had many financial and personal problems at the time. Much of the difficulty came from three divorces—he was married for a fourth time in 1942. Then he underwent a series of operations for cancer that drained his finances even more. In the late 1950s he landed a few parts, most notably as Sergeant Brown in *The Horse Soldiers* in 1959. The following year he had an uncredited bit in *Ocean 's Eleven,* his last film appearance. Seeing him in *The Horse Soldiers,* with John Wayne and other actors whose careers went back to silent films, was like seeing an old friend grown old. Cancer finally claimed him in 1962.

In contrast to Gibson's later misfortunes, Timothy John Fitzgerald McCoy enjoyed a long and successful career that spanned more than forty years and included the new medium of television. Born in Michigan in 1891, Tim McCoy worked in Wyoming as a cowboy, started a ranch, and learned sign language to communicate with the local Shoshone and Arapaho. He served in World War I and emerged a colonel, worked after the war as an Indian agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and became an authority on Native American history and culture.

McCoy's entry into Hollywood was spectacular in its own way. Paramount was filming the epic movie *The Covered Wagon* and asked the Bureau of Indian Affairs if it could lend the studio 500 Indians as extras. The bureau asked McCoy to supply the Indians and interpret for them. McCoy provided the Indians and served as technical advisor for the film, then organized a wild west show with the Indians and went on tour. He returned to Hollywood in 1925, signed with MGM, and worked continuously in films until 1942. A decade later he reappeared as host of the "Tim McCoy" series on Los Angeles television, presenting Western

lore and a respectful view of the Indians that contrasted with the usual Hollywood stereotype. Iron Eyes Cody was a frequent guest on the show. McCoy still appeared in occasional films. You can see him as a U.S. Cavalry colonel in the film *Around the World in Eighty Days.* His last film was *Requiem for a Gunfighter* in 1965. McCoy came out of retirement to be interviewed in the outstanding series *Hollywood* on the silent film era. He passed away in 1978 at the age of eighty-six.

The stars of the silent Westerns were predominantly male, but Mary Louise Cecelia Guinan, best known as Texas Guinan stands as the exception to the rule. Born in Waco, Texas, in 1884, she is best remembered as the hostess at New York speakeasy nightclubs during the Prohibition era, greeting guests by saying, "Hello, suckers!" But she also starred in several dozen two-reel Westerns. After working in vaudeville, she came to Hollywood in 1917 and worked for independent companies, turning out more than fifty films. Texas portrayed a fiercely independent woman, often the owner of her own ranch and beholden to no one. This kind of characterization would not be seen again until actress Barbara Stanwyck appeared in Westerns. Sadly, her work seems very dated by modem standards. In the film *Girl of the Rancho* a neighboring ranch owner, coveting her hand in marriage as well as her ranch, proposes to her. The man happens to be a Mexican. Texas rejects him and the intertitle reads, "When I marry at all it will be to a white man, not a Mexican." When I saw this film at the Niles Festival in 2000, the political correctness of our time brought the unusual experience of the audience hissing the heroine. Times do change. Texas made a few sound films but died of an illness in 1933 at age 49.

Charles Frederick Gebhart was born in Indiana in 1889, served in the U.S. Army in the Philippines, toured with the 101 Ranch Wild West Show and the Ringling Brothers Circus, and raced cars at the Indianapolis Speedway. He started in Hollywood as an extra and stunt double, but reenlisted in the Army when the United States entered the

Texas Guinan. Courtesy of *Winners of the West: The Sagebrush Heroes of the Silent Screen* by Kalton C. Lahue.

Great War. Returning to the movies, he played bit parts for a couple of years. Fox Studios was having problems with a temperamental Tom Mix who wanted more money. Hoping to keep Mix in line, the studio picked Gebhart as a replacement and made him a star. He also got a new name: Buck Jones.

Jones made more than seventy films in the silent era, spending eight years at Fox. He was an immediate success with film audiences and offered a less glamorous character than the flamboyant Mix. The studio made him more presentable by having his teeth capped, but such adjustments had little to do with his star power. He went from silents to sound films without a break, making seventy-five films between 1930 and 1942. By the 1940s, in his fifties, he appeared as Marshal Buck Roberts in his last ten films. In fact, in most of his pictures he was called "Buck"—Buck Ward, Buck Crosby, Buck Saunders, etc. His career ended abruptly on November 30, 1942, when he died in the Coconut Grove fire in Boston,

Massachusetts.

Although there is no evidence to prove one way or another, the legend has grown that Jones died trying to help others escape from the fire. Hollywood might claim that if things didn't happen that way, they should have.

Yakima Canutt, born Enos Edward Canutt in 1896, is best remembered for his outstanding stunt work and his teaching the tricks of the trade to generations of stunt doubles. When Indiana Jones is dragged behind the Nazi truck in *Raiders of the Lost Ark,* knowledgeable film fans will immediately make the connection to the movie *Stagecoach* where Canutt did the same stunt. However, before he was a stunt man and second unit director, Canutt appeared as a Western hero in more than thirty films between 1919 and 1929. He got the name Yakima when an announcer mangled his name at a rodeo, thinking he was from that town in Washington. Actually, he was born in Colfax, Washington.

Rodeo work led to Hollywood, as it did for many actors, and Canutt's silent films were noted for fast action and great stunts. Unfortunately, stardom eluded Canutt, who worked for a small independent studio that was restricted in its release of his films. Yakima also insisted on keeping his name instead of going the Hollywood way and taking a simpler name as Charles Gebhart did. Ironically, audiences found Yakima's breathtaking stunts hard to believe and he did his own without a double. So Canutt was important for silent films but made his greatest contribution in his stunt work. His long list of film credits from 1929 to 1959 is mainly for bit parts or uncredited roles. It's what he did with the stunts that made action films work. Canutt lived until 1986, dying at age ninety, passing his legacy to his son in the stunt and directing fields.

Of the many other actors in silent Western movies, mention should also be made of Ken Maynard, who made some two dozen films in the silent era, plus another sixty between 1929 and 1944. And no honor role would be complete without Art Acord, Jack Holt, and Al Hoxie. Still, memory is selective, and some figures stand out more than others. Tom Tyler, born Vincent Markowski in 1903, was a gifted athlete from Michigan who made more than thirty films in the silent era, most of them Westerns. Leading man roles eluded him in the 1930s, but he found work in supporting roles, appearing in numerous Westerns on both sides of the law. You can see him as the villain Luke Plummer killed by John Wayne's Ringo Kid in *Stagecoach,* and as the wounded Army corporal aided by Wayne in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon.* Rheumatoid arthritis ruined his health, and he died of a heart attack in 1954.

Fred Thomson, an almost forgotten name today, was a major Western star of the 1920s. Trained as a Presbyterian minister, Thomson offered a clean-cut image sorely needed in a Hollywood in the early 1920s that was getting hit with one scandal after another. Fred met Frances Marion, one of the most important women in the history of motion pictures for her award-winning screenplays, and they were married in 1919. He earned his film popularity, however, on the strength of his personality and athletic ability. As with Willliam S. Hart's horse Fritz, Tom Mix's Tony, and Ken Maynard's Tarzan, Thomson had a horse named Silver King that was as much the star of the films than he was. Also, along with Mix, Jones, and Gibson, among other Western stars, Thomson attracted a young audience, and he played morally upright figures both on and off screen.

Of all the stars of Westerns in this period, Thomson did not survive the silent era. On December 25, 1928, he died of tetanus, leaving his wife and two small children. Thomson had taken some risks with his last few films. In 1927 he starred in *Jesse James,* but he played the part without any reference to the outlaw's career as a Civil War guerrilla or his many crimes. Filmgoers in James's home state of Missouri resented the whitewash, and critics panned the picture. Historian Jon Tuska argues that *Jesse James* killed off Thomson's star stature. While it

was tetanus that killed the man, his death left some unanswered questions. Tetanus and horses share the same environment, and Thomson should have been aware of the danger when he told his wife he had stepped on a rusty nail. Thomson's last films include *The Pioneer Scout* and *Kit Carson.* Whether sound films would have revived Thomson's career is a matter of speculation. Odd to note, a decade after the failure of Thomson's *Jesse James* at the box office, Roy Rogers made *Days of Jesse James* as a Western musical, and no one complained.

A survey of Western actors in the silent era would be incomplete without reference to the unusual career of Alphonso J. Jennings. Most Western historians have ridiculed him and branded him a fraud, but Jennings, by virtue of outliving all his enemies, may have had the last laugh. Al Jennings never became a movie star, and his movies didn't make much money, but his show business career eventually paid better dividends than his career as a bandit. Born in Virginia in 1863, Al became a lawyer, then a train robber, and very soon after that, a convict. This was because his outlaw career lasted only a brief period in 1897. A sheriff's posse quickly tracked him down, the jury found him guilty, and a judge sentenced him to life in prison. This seems excessive since he didn't kill or injure anyone, and he was pardoned in 1907. Jennings resumed his law career and ran unsuccessfully for several offices in Oklahoma, including the governor's seat.

In 1913 journalist Will Irwin penned Jennings's life story for the *Saturday Evening Post.* Jennings spun one outrageous yarn after another about his outlaw career, and Irwin took it all down. His contemporaries probably choked it down, but more was to come. In 1914 Jennings accepted $5,000 from the Thanhouser Film Company to make a movie out of *Beating Back*, the ghostwritten autobiography Irwin prepared from the *Post* articles, with Jennings as technical advisor and star. He quickly realized there was money to be made in the movies. He appeared in a few films, then set up his own production company. Jennings publicized himself as a reformed bandit but also played a lawman in his films.

Al Jennings was not much more than five feet in height, skinny as a rail, and most unromantic in appearance, looking older than his actual age. Yet ironically he produced and acted in an elite group of films that portrayed the Old West more realistically than any of his movie star contemporaries. His movie *The Lady of the Dugout* merits special notice. Historians writing about the settlement of the prairie and Great Plains note the shortage of wood. Thousands of settlers built their first home of sod. Everett Dick even titled one of his books *The Sod-House Frontier.* Only a few movies show settlers living in sod houses, and *The Lady of the Dugout* is one of them. Another film is *Unforgiven,* made in 1960 and starring Burt Lancaster, Audrey Hepburn, Audie Murphy, and Lillian Gish, a fine film of interest for many reasons, including the sod house and the performance of Lillian Gish, whose career in movies lasted more than seventy-five years.

Unfortunately for Jennings, his films made little money and were outside the mainstream of production and distribution. He hovered on the fringes of Hollywood, making a living as a preacher and occasionally getting a bit part in a film. When Warner Bros. made *The Oklahoma Kid* with James Cagney playing an improbable Western hero, Jennings was hired as a technical advisor. But vindication for Jennings finally arrived in 1951 when Columbia filmed *Al Jennings of Oklahoma* starring Dan Duryea as Al. By this time no one was left who could contradict Al's version of his past. The movie was based on *Beating Back,* and Al became a sort of elder statesman to gullible young reporters who would interview him at his home in Tarzana. In his last years the number of gunmen he allegedly killed rose geometrically, as did his robberies and narrow escapes from posses. He died on December 26, 1961, age ninety-eight, no doubt satisfied that, like James Stewart's Ransom Stoddard character in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* his legend was printed.

In determining the actor who was truly last of the silent Western stars, the award would surely go to Bob Steele. He made almost 200 movies in a career that began in 1920 and lasted until 1973. Born Bob Bradbury, Jr., in 1907, he became Bob Steele in 1925 to avoid confusion with his father, a film director. He made about fifteen silent films, then moved into the sound era through dozens of "B" Westerns and action serials. Perhaps the high point of his acting career was his portrayal of the sadistic foreman Curley in *Of Mice and Men* in the 1939 version.

Steele made a consistent living in formula Westerns, plus he revitalized his career in the 1950s as a character actor. He also found work on television in episodes of *Maverick, Rawhide,* and as a continuing character in F *Troop.* Steele's last TV credit was in 1969 in an episode of *Then Came Bronson.* His final big-screen appearance was in *Charley Varrick* in 1973. Steele's roles in his last movies often were as a bank guard, cook, or deputy, but you never could tell when he might pop up in an important supporting role, as in his playing an Army colonel in 1959's *Pork Chop Hill,* starring Gregory Peck.

When Bob Steele died in 1988 at age eighty-one, the last of the silent era Westerns died with him. Altogether, Steele and Hart and Mix and Anderson and all the others made thousands of movies, from one-reelers to feature films, on minuscule budgets to major productions. They not only set the stage for Western and action movies, they also rode in it, chased it, held it up, protected it, and had a great time doing all of the above. Seldom seen today, the movies they made may have been silent, but they speak out to us about an exciting and innovative era of motion picture history.

An earlier version of this article was presented to the Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners at the April 2002 meeting.

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Henry Fonda in *My Darling Clementine*.Courtesy of author.

Western Film and Vigilante Justice

by Frank Dooley

The great American Western films are indebted to the times in which they were produced. The Western is a reflection of nineteenth century American cultural values as perceived by Hollywood in the twentieth century. The Hollywood perception of the western film is based on a formula of several common attributes. "One man's vigilante justice could empower an entire town plagued by anarchy" is a common attribute in all western films.

Anarchy must reign in the towns of the west. Townships either do not have a police force or contain a weak sheriff who is ineffectual or corrupt. A town gladly finds an unshaven rogue or a gunslinger with an irrefutable past to enforce laws. The township apathetically accepts the militant control and arbitrary justice that the new sheriff provides. He disregards individual civil rights and creates his own laws and ways of law enforcement.

In *My Darling Clementine*, director John Ford and cinematographer Joseph MacDonald, show us a noisy lawless Tombstone full of long shadows. The light in the bar burns people like the sun. Characters are over exposed and in high contrast black and white. Enter a young disheveled, unshaven Wyatt (Henry Fonda). His cattle are stolen and brother is killed. The sheriff in Tombstone cannot help him. He can't even get a decent shave in this town, when gunfire plummets into his bowl of boiling shaving cream. One crazy Injun stirs up the town like a whirlwind. The town hides in terror and not one brave soul will confront him. Even the current sheriff is conveniently absent, during the crazy Injun's plunder. An angry Wyatt shows up covered in shaving cream, ready to battle with the man who stopped him from a clean shave. Wyatt is so bad, that he drags the drunk Injun out of the bar, knocks him square in the jaw and establishes order. Wyatt is instantly perceived as a law enforcer and a man not to be messed with. Wyatt's transformation from small time cattle roper to law enforcing power seems mythical in a town filled with chaos.

Meanwhile, Clanton's cattle rustlers have murdered Wyatt's brother. Wyatt plans to stay and dispense some justice in a lawless town. Wyatt confronts old man Clanton (Walter Brennan with a whip in hand) about the murder. Clanton reacts with smirking laughter and cracks his own son with the whip. The laughter seems to be a confession of guilt. Wyatt needs reinforcements to fight this battle with such a large family. A circumspect Wyatt walks away into film noir lighting, moving from a brightly lit porch into darkness of the town. Wyatt searches for recruits in the local bar. A deep focus shot across the bar, reveals the burned out overexposed lighting hanging over the heads of the other customers. Wyatt is shadowed by darkness. His clean-shaven face represents his new mythical identity. Doc Holiday, Wyatt's first recruit, inquires to Wyatt, "You going to deliver us from evil?"

Indeed Wyatt will create his own form of vigilante justice and deliver the town from

The Wild Bunch. Courtesy of author.

evil. Church bells in Tombstone signal that Wyatt represents a new morality that he has single handedly developed in this lawless town. Wyatt's famous pose on the porch is a perfect visual image showing his political power over the town. His leg propped up against the front post. His back is against the front wall. The front of the chair tilted up. He looks as if he's ready to kick that post out, so the roof will come tumbling down. Wyatt is the empowered hero who represents law and order, and without him, civilization will come tumbling down.

Civilization has not struck the small town of Sweetwater in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*. It's a ghost town dominated by an oversized railroad station filled with squeaking weather fans, ticker tape, enormous buzzing flies, miles of wooden slats, missing plank boards and plenty of dust and heat. With no sheriff in sight, the town provides prime opportunity for criminal rule. The railroad owns most of the town and appointed steely-eyed Frank (Henry Fonda) to kill off a wealthy Irish immigrant family. The family owns the most valuable property in the desert, because of its access to the most important commodity, water. The land's abundance of water opens the possibilities for the town's growth and the railroad company's thirst for money.

The film centers on this undeveloped property, which the railroad company is desperate to control. The plot of a typical western film centers on characters battling for a mysterious land that contains a valuable commodity. The family that owns the valuable commodity (water in this film) is in constant threat from the evils of the railroad company. *Once Upon a Time in the West* is a mythical story about lonely pioneers developing the west through control of water supplies and city planning. The railroad is crucial to city development because it provides transport for building supplies, labor and migration. The railroad provides the means for city development, but at the same time prevents the individual pioneer from providing a vision and the means to build a community. The brutal murder of the immigrant landowner's family exposes the greed and corruption behind the railroad company. These immigrants have to hire their own vigilantes to protect them from the threat of the railroad company.

The railroad is controlled by a homesick immigrant Mr. Morton. Morton has hired a professional assassin Frank to do his dirty work and establish order in the town. Morton only wants Frank to intimidate the wealthy landowners. Frank says, "People scare easier when they're dead." More blood will be spilled to keep the railroad in power.

Mr. Morton represents the power of the railroad. He is a man trapped in his own private train that circles around the city. Frank

sarcastically calls him "Mr. Choo Choo". He cannot escape his train compartment or symbolic coffin, because he is paralyzed in both legs. The train compartment is his office equipped with a bizarre maze of steel bars that he swings on like a monkey. The office reeks of money, complete with mahogany walls, brass fittings, red velvet and a flushing toilet. Morton's fate ends with him crawling like a turtle toward a puddle of water. Morton never reaches the water and Frank avoids killing Morton. Frank lets him die reaching for the town's most valuable commodity, water. In death, he ended up in the waters that he dreamed of, but never obtained the water needed to develop the city of Sweetwater.

Only a few strong-willed pioneers could fight against the powers of the railroad company. Our heroes in the western films were really vigilantes hired by wealthy underdogs, who desperately needed to restore town order. These communities could not build and flourish without these cold-blooded men who established their own vigilante justice and law enforcement. In *Once Upon a Time in the West*, Cheyenne (Jason Robards) has escaped being hanged as a murderer. He has been tortured and has escaped in handcuffs. To the wealthy landowner and opportunist Mrs. McBain (Claudia Cardinale), he's a lovable rogue with doom in his eyes. Cheyenne says the beautiful Mrs. McBain reminds him of his dear old mother. Harmonica (Charles Bronson) is a mysterious and silent gunfighter who communicates through harmonica noises and secretly wants bloody revenge on Frank. Mrs. McBain hires these lonely and violent pioneers to protect her from Frank who has murdered her family. She would later discover the railroad company was behind the killing. The western myth dictates a transformation of down and out criminals (Cheyenne and Harmonica) to vigilante heroes. Like Wyatt in *My Darling Clementine*, Cheyenne shaves his beard to indicate his new identity. Cheyenne becomes a new man now that he is reunited with his mother figure, Mrs. McBain. Harmonica achieves his revenge against Frank when he gives up his symbolic death trumpet, by shoving it between Frank's teeth. Order is restored and a long camera dolly reveals massive building construction, water lines and railroad ties. The blood bath of our vigilante heroes has paved the way for a new community.

The railroad company controls small town justice in *The Wild Bunch*. The railroad company hires inmates from the county prison to enforce the law. In exchange for protecting the interests of the railroad, the inmates would achieve their freedom from jail. These bounty hunters are prepared to wreak havoc on the innocent citizens of a small Texas town in order to capture a famous group of train thieves (the wild bunch). The bounty hunters are like hyenas. They giggle and snort like predators waiting to pounce on their prey. The barbarity of these hyenas contrast with the formality of the wild bunch, who are disguised as soldiers. They politely help an old lady across the street and carry her packages. Once our well dressed soldiers enter the bank, the decorum ceases and Pike (William Holden) breaks his gentleman character by threatening the banker with "Anybody moves. Kill 'em!" Sam Peckenpah's credit appears directly after the line, telling us the director is threatening his audience. These are not your vigilante heroes that you root for in a traditional western, but honorable thieves who are stealing from a corrupt company. The soldiers, now revealed as bank robbers, are willing to march with the churchgoers with their stash of stolen money. The hyena bounty hunters have a free-for-all shooting spree against innocent churchgoers and horse-riding-slow-motion glass-breakers. After blood has been spilled, the scavenger hyenas fight over jewelry and gold extracted teeth from the corpses. The townspeople are outraged by the carnage. The evil railroad company purposely did not tell the small Texas town about the bloody ambush. It might have spoiled the railroad's surprise capture.

The film opens with a group of children watching hundreds of ants devouring a scor-

pion. The same metaphor occurs during the town massacre. We see from a bird's eye point of view that innocent townspeople (ants) are being massacred in slow motion by the goons of the evil railroad company (the scorpion). The wild bunch will be transformed from petty drunk womanizing thieves to vigilante heroes battling over the evil railroad company and a militant Mexican government. The wild bunch will become the scorpions who outsmart them.

The film is set in 1914, marking the end of western vigilante justice. New forms of weapons used in war would replace the gun toting power of the wild bunch. The bunch is introduced to one of the most effective tools of mass destruction before WWI, the automatic machine gun. The bunch is moving into the age of the automobile and the end of the horse. The end of the gun toting macho men controlling the law begins with military and political leaders who now control weapons of mass destruction. Because of the commercial use of explosives and grenades, the wild bunch is now an antiquated breed. The bunch's sense of honor also makes them a dying breed.

They decide to work for General Mapache, a powerful Mexican military leader whose mission is to destroy the working class rebels of Pancho Villa. He hires the wild bunch to steal American weapons that are being transported by the railroad. General Mapache cannot steal the American military weapons because ironically the general wants to keep good relations with American forces. The bunch goes to work as mercenary soldiers to steal the American weapons, which will in turn be used by the general to kill the poor Mexican community, supporting Pancho Villa.

Angel, a Mexican member of the bunch comes from a family supporting Villa. "Would you give guns to someone who would kill your father, or mother or brother?" says Angel to the bunch. Pike responds, "Ten thousand dollars cuts a lot of family ties." Angel wants guns for his people who have no ammo. The bunch has to ambush a train in order to capture the guns. Once again the bunch is pitted against the railroad company.

The film sets up two axis of evil, a greedy American corporation, the railroad company and a corrupted military run Mexican federation. Once the bunch pirates the ammo, the American military (funded by the railroad company) makes a botched attempt to catch up to the bunch.

The bunch has become mercenary soldiers not unlike American soldiers in Vietnam, fifty years later. These guns for hire fight for a corrupt Mexican leader whom they will later defy. They were not saving the world from communism, but setting up their own Contra wars like the CIA. The wild bunch like the CIA could never leave a man behind. That is the bunch's code of honor.

The conspiracy question is, what are the Americans doing with sixteen cases of arms in Mexico? Was Peckinpah implying that Americans were assisting the Mexican Federation in fighting against Pancho Villa? Was Pancho Villa's gang more threatening to America because he represented communism. Was Pancho Villa an anathema to the all powerful railroad company? Would the railroad company gain more from the cooperation of General Mapache and his troops rather than Villa's peasants? The film sounds like repercussions of the Vietnam conflict. The bunch is caught between two worlds: the drunk and corrupt military fascism of General Mapache and the corrupt guerrilla tactics of Villa's communist peasants. The bunch jumps into the maelstrom of violence for honor, first as mercenaries' then as real freedom fighters for the poor.

The wild bunch's vigilante justice is pure suicide and yet they elect to battle against the impossible powers of the west, military leaders and the railroad company. Even though their honorable fight ends in death, they succeed in defeating General Mapache's soldiers and stop the railroad company by blowing up a bridge and defying the forces of the American military.

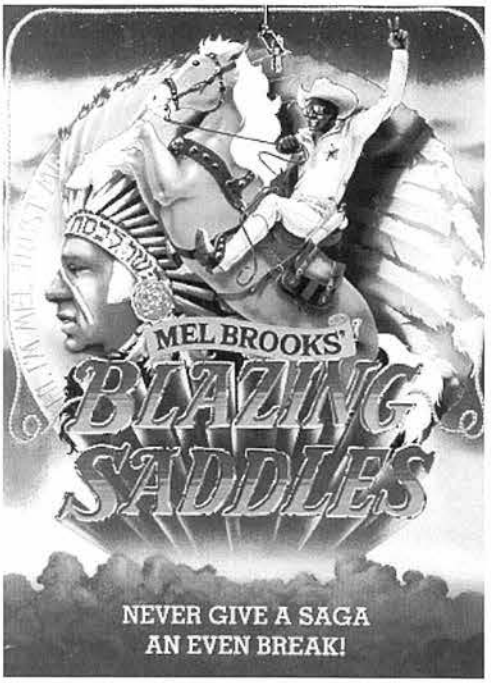
A black sheriff (Cleavon Little) must oppose the forces of a racist town and a land hungry district attorney (Harvey Korman) in

Mel Brook' s western parody, *Blazing Saddles*. This is the first major motion picture in which a western is told through an African American's point of view.

The district attorney's thugs provide plenty of intimidation for the town of Rockridge. Like Mr. Morton in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the district attorney presides over all judicial decisions. Like Morton, he is stuck in his fancy office, watches executions through his window, which periodically slams over his head, and plots evil deeds with good ole boy Slim Pickens and an oversexed mayor. His only humane contact is with the naked female statue of justice, which he periodically fondles when his goal of destroying Rockridge becomes a reality. A long line of innocents (a man in a wheelchair, an old lady, and a horse) awaits execution under his jurisdiction. "Kill all the men and rape the shit out of all the women" is Slim Pickens' suggestion to the attorney to bring fear into Rockridge. "Law and order is the last thing I want. Snatch two thousand acres of Indian land. The red devils love toys" says the district attorney. His idea is to offer the Indians red paddleballs in exchange for land. The attorney is an equal opportunity employer, when he hires the worst thugs to keep the town in anarchy. The camera dollies across a line up of Nazis, KKK members with pointed hats, Harley Davidson riders, and Arabs who plan on destroying Rockridge.

The attorney's thugs greet the town with comical sadism. They run a stampede of cattle through the bar. They sock a horse in the head. They punch an old lady in the stomach. She comments to the camera, "Have you ever seen such cruelty". They expose a naked man in soapsuds, while men break through windows by the dozen. The town has a meeting in the church singing a reverent hymn pleading "Our town is turning into shit." They desperately need a sheriff. The attorney's brilliant plan is to send a "rigger' to cause more pandemonium.

Sheriff Bart was a railroad worker getting slave wages and is ready to be hanged when his identity is transformed. The western film formula is to transform the identity of an underdog character and turn them into a vigilante hero like Wyatt, Harmonica, Shane, and other western characters. When Bart enters the town, all is silent, then the sound of cocked guns aimed at the towns new "nigger". Bart holds a gun to his own head threatening to kill the "nigger" if anybody moves.



Blazing Saddles Poster. Courtesy of author.

Sheriff Bart befriends the Waco kid (Gene Wilder), a mythical lonely cowboy who "likes to play chess and screw." Like all mythical cowboys, whiskey is mother's milk to him. Bart suggests, "Maybe you should eat something first." "No, thanks", Waco says, "Food makes me sick." He has a death wish and is the fastest gun in the West. So fast, that you never see his hand move. "I must have killed more men then Cecil B. DeMille." He gave up shooting after a six-year-old shot him in the ass. Waco asks Bart, "What's a dazzling urbanite like you doing in a rustic setting like this?" They become instant buddies and take on the attorney's goons single handedly. They restore order to the town and gain the town's respect despite the color of his skin. A kind-

ly old lady offers him a freshly made apple pie. She adds, "Of course you'll have the good taste not to mention that I spoke to you. Sorry about the 'up yours rigger'."

Sheriff Bart drums up support from his fellow African American and Chinese railroad workers to construct a fake town. The townspeople promise the minorities land in exchange for their work. There is one hitch. One townsperson says, "We'll give some land to the riggers and the chinks, but we don't want the Irish." "No deal" replies the Sheriff. "All right, everybody!" The minorities are empowered in the film. The good guys blow up the fake town and trap the bad guys. African Americans punch out the white red necks. Old ladies knock out macho men. A Priest kicks the men in the groin saying "Forgive me Lord". Even the gay men's chorus conquers these fighting cowboys.

Americans might question the use of the word "nigger" and question whether this film promotes racism since it gives white Americans a good laugh. On the other hand, it promotes the empowerment of African Americans and other minorities and could only be made in the 1970's when civil rights issues were becoming more acceptable. Mel Brooks never apologizes for the white cruelty in the film. The townspeople are cold and separate themselves from the Sheriff except when the Sheriff can solve the anarchy in the town. He receives no sympathy. Brooks may have been thinking of Gary Cooper in *High Noon*, who went through a similar experience. The film ends with Sheriff Bart mimicking Henry Fonda's final *Grapes of Wrath* speech, "Wherever outlaws rule the West. Wherever a people cry out for justice. I'll be there." The townspeople respond, "Bullshit!" Sheriff Bart drives off into the sunset, gets off his horse and climbs into a Cadillac.

The lonely wandering pioneer. Mythical and isolated men wander from town to town searching for opportunities to build ranches or whore houses, bring order (or chaos), con individuals (or be conned), find gold, a wife, or a new identity. Look for the wandering pioneer in the continuing episodes of the Western film formula.

THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

NOVEMBER MEETING

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

November Meeting Speaker Miles Hood Swarthout.

Corral members were treated to an evening with writer Miles Hood Swarthout. Miles is a screenwriter and author of several short stories and novels. His recent book, *The Sergeant's Lady*, has a backdrop of the United States military campaigns against the Apaches in 1886.

Miles presentation involved the historical aspects from *The Sergeant's Lady*, including the exploits of Geronimo, use of Morse-coded messages between forts, and the significance of heliography in defeating the Apache tribes. Miles research for the book included details on Apache ingenuity in avoiding capture by using women as spies, couriers and fighters. He noted that Geronimo's people were tough guerrilla fighters, forged from a deep understanding of the desert frontier. He also detailed the famed exploits of Annie Oakley, a crack shot, and the tactical genius of Brigadier General Nelson Miles use of sun-flashing techniques with Morse code in order to coordinate logistical movements by the army. With an unrelenting creed to "always advance," General Miles and 5,000 soldiers eventually forced a surrender of the Apache force, just south of the Arizona border.

Mr. Swarthout's idea for a novel came from an earlier short story entitled, "The Attack on the Mountain," which dealt with the Apache Campaign across the unforgiving deserts and treacherous mountains of the Arizona frontier. The novel includes a romance, tough frontier women, suspense, and history as a backdrop, which makes for a true Wild West storyline, and an enjoyable evening as well.

DECEMBER MEETING

Sybil Downing is an award-winning author of over a dozen young adult and children's books. She has also written four novels, a biography, and numerous articles for journals and magazines. Her most recent work is *The Binding Oath*, a novel set in the 1920s at a time when the Ku Klux Klan terrorized Colorado politics and society.

Ms. Downing gave a forthright account of the myths and realities concerning the contribution of women in the West. The view of frontier women has often been relegated to a subordinate role in the making of the frontier; stereotyped as they were in literature and lore as a docile supporting role to the rugged individualism of men. Yet women came west for opportunity, were risk takers, cut a life for themselves, and made significant contributions to the settlement of the West. There was the famous bronco rider, Bertha Blancett; frontier women like Wyoming's Cattle Kate, who stuck up for her right to a brand and was hanged for her trouble; photographer E. L. Cameron documented the realistic lifestyle of western

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

December Meeting Speaker Sybil Downing.

women through her famous photographs, such as "Ladies on Horseback" and "Chinese Lady in Snow"; and Willa Cather's popular writings about Nebraska prairie life captured the strength and courage of pioneer women on the open range.

Of course, women have always played an important role in American reform movements. They provided the driving force behind the national suffrage movement, particularly in the western states of Iowa, Montana, and Colorado. Indeed, it is not surprising that the first woman elected to Congress, Jeannette Rankin, was from the "big sky" state of Montana. In 1914, the tragic role of women was vital in bringing national attention to the labor struggles at the mines in Ludlow, Colorado. As Ms. Downing pointedly observed, the massacre of women and children at the 1914 Ludlow Tent camp brought national focus on the conditions which triggered the strike and eventually led to national labor reform.

Sybil gave a salute to the Autry Museum for their financial support and involvement in the development of "Women in the West" exhibits. Under the capable leadership of historian Virginia Scharf, along with a $2 million grant from the Women of the West Museum in Colorado, upcoming exhibits will focus on aspects of the pioneer lifestyle and contributions of pioneer women. The Autry Museum will showcase many of these future exhibits. "The stories of women in the West," Ms. Downing concluded, "are very much on the front burner. And right here in your back yard."

2003 YEAR IN REVIEW

It was a memorable year for the Los Angeles Corral under the fine leadership of Sheriff **Bob Blew**. The Los Angeles Corral published a keepsake that contained a compendium of western essays by **Abe Hoffman**, and the corral hosted a successful Fandango and Rendezvous.

Abe Hoffman's *The Horse You Rode In On: Essays in Western History*, is a collection of personal essays on a variety of subjects in the West. From outlaws and train robberies, to Zorro, California earthquakes, and surfing, this keepsake covers interesting and nuanced subjects that make for fascinating reading. These crisp vignettes cover three broad topics involving the western frontier, California history, and how the film industry has portrayed the West. This well-written entry takes its place in the long tradition of Los Angeles Westerners publications, and is a worthy addition to the libraries of our corral membership.

In June, the Fandango was held on the stately grounds of the Pasadena Museum of History. Approximately eighty members dined on a wonderful barbecue meal amidst the shade of large trees and manicured gardens.

Founded in 1924, the rich collections of art and local history make the Pasadena Museum a popular destination for many local residents, faraway visitors, and scholars. Corral members were treated to afternoon tours of the nineteenth century Fenyes Mansion and Gardens. Built in 1906, the interior of this exquisitely restored structure provides a glimpse of early twentieth century life in Pasadena, while the Folk Art Museum contains Finnish arts and crafts from earlier periods.

Due to the generosity of **Ramon and Mary Ann Otero**, the Rendezvous was again held at their Victorian-style home in the historic district of Monrovia. **Andrew Dagosta**

and **Jan Porter** supplied art work for prizes, and **Eric Nelson** was honored for his important contributions to the Los Angeles Westerners. Eric has worked tirelessly to bring new energy to the corral, and he has expanded membership, organized events, and contributed essays to *The Branding Iron*. Eric's message to the corral members at the Rendezvous was to "get involved" and be a part of this wonderful organization.

The Los Angeles Corral expresses a special thanks to all the members who have made this past year a success, particularly the individuals who have worked behind the scenes at these events. They have and will continue to make the Los Angeles Corral a special organization in the celebration of the West.

Cowboy Campfire

by Loren Wendt

Tyler could see the glow from almost a mile away
His long night-herdin' shift was over for the day
He was looking forward to hot coffee and hard-tack
Then all he really wanted was just to "hit the sack "

But when he reached the campfire and all his friends
He knew there'd be a poker game that never ends
So between the coffee—the cards—and all the talk
It wasn't long until he had to take that "necessary" walk

Then he arranged his bed-roll and promptly went to sleep
He didn't even worry about the money he wouldn't keep
There was lots of snoring from that worn-out tired bunch
And they didn't even stir until almost time for lunch

They finished beans and jerky and biscuits in a hurry
Cuz' they knew the Foreman's yell and they'd have to scurry
Sure enough, " Tyler, Red and Kramer, get up on your saddle Forget that cozy campfire—it's your turn for herdin' cattle !"

Corral Chips

Past sheriff **JOHN ROBINSON** gave an informative presentation on the history of the San Antonio Canyon and Camp Baldy at the Mount Baldy Visitor Center on March 6. John also signed books and answered questions on the old mountain trails and cabins of days gone by.

On Valentines Day, February 14, **KEN PAULEY** presented Part III—"Volume Measurements," of the four part series: *Weights and Measurements in California's Mission Period,* to the 21st Annual Conference of the California Missions Studies Association (www.ca-missions.org). The conference was held at Mission San Luis Obispo. The series concludes next spring at Mission San Fernando, with Part IV—"Weight Measurements" Ken and his wife Carol are completing their magnum opus of twenty-six years in the making: *San Fernando Rey de Espana: An Illustrated History*. Anyone interested in the publishing and distribution of this major project are encouraged to contact Ken and Carol.

DON FRANKLIN (sheriff 91') is planning a European excursion this summer. Don will spend eight days in London, near Hyde Park. Then he plans to travel to Italy, spend three nights in Milan and tour several important cities in northern Italy, including Bolzano--where a 4,000 year old carbon dated man is on display. No, Don is not looking to complete his personal genealogy with this trip.

DONALD DUKE received the Gerald M. Best Senior Achievement Award for his five decades of outstanding writing, publishing, photography, and preservation of American Railroad ephemera.

Many thanks go to **ANDREW DAGOSTA**, who has recently donated sketches and artwork for use in the *Branding Iron*. Andy has also supplied paintings and sketches for the Fandango and Rendezvous for the past several years. Indeed, beauty is in the eye of the beholder!

New Members

Joseph P. Bonino
3110 Kirkham Dr.
Glendale, CA 91206

Marge Green
127 Maverick Dr.
San Dimas, CA 91773

Phyllis Hansen
1615 Laurel Ave., No. 116
Los Angeles, CA 90046

Louis Emmet Mahoney
3025 Frontier St.
Cheyenne, WY 82001

Trushar Patel
20216 E. Walnut Canyon Rd.
Walnut, CA 91789

Fandango 2003

Photograph by Frank Q. Newton.

A view of the rear side of the Finnish mansion and the surrounding grounds.

Photograph by Frank Q. Newton.

Sheriff Bob Blew needs work!

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

Jeannette and Bill Davis with guest Bonnie Moore enjoying good food and conversation.

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

Eric Nelson and Vicky and Gary Turner give "three cheers" to the Corral.

Rendezvous 2003

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

Sold! Jerry Selmer and Eric Nelson worked to make the book auction a success.

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

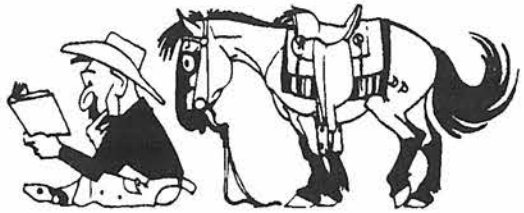
Jane Warren poses with her prized Andy Dagosta original painting.

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

Glenn Thornhill and Bob Ebiner at the silent auction table.

Photograph by Froy Tiscareño.

Paul and Nolene Showalter at the grub line.



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL . . .

LOST AND FOUND: *Historic and Natural Landmarks of the San Gabriel Valley*, by Elizabeth Pomeroy. Pasadena: Many Moons Press, 2000. 228 pp. Illustrations. Paper, $19.85. Order from Many Moons Press, P.O Box 94505, Pasadena, CA 91109 (626) 791-7660.

So your cousin is coming out from the East again and wants to see the "classic California Architecture" but you have already been to the Gamble House in Pasadena, the Banning House in Willmington, and most of the other structures recommended in the visitors' guide. Here is a book that will open new doors.

Elizabeth Pomeroy has compiled selections from five years of her columns "Lost and Found" that she writes for the *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, the *Pasadena Star News* and the *Whittier Daily News*. The book is arraigned to make it easy for planning an outing in the San Gabriel Valley. The four major divisions cover north, south, east and west, so you can quickly find locations in your area of intent. Within the sections site locations are alphabetized by city.

Each site of interest is presented on two pages with a photograph or drawing, description of the subject, brief history and how to get there instructions, including both freeway and surface streets. Being in southern California, public transportation is not included.

Because of the space limitations of a two page format you might want to do a little additional reading before taking your out of town guests on the road. The information given is adequate for the accidental tourist, and gives a good starting place if you decide to dazzle your guest with local knowledge.

Many of the locations in this book might be found in guides available from the forty cities listed. I think having all 103 of these sites listed in one book makes the book a good buy. This reviewer realizes in many cases he may have more interest in antiquities than his guests, therefore he considers the book a good addition to the home library. It is an available reference when there is a quick need to get out and "Just do something."

—Bill Davis

THE RAILROAD ARTISTRY OF HOWARD FOGG, by Ronald C. Hill and Al Chione. San Rafael: Cedco Publishing Company, 168 pp., Illustrations. Hardbound, $49.95 plus tax and shipping. Order from Cedco Publishing Company 100 Pelican Way, San Rafael, CA 91901.

Who was it who said, "I never saw a Howard Fogg painting I didn't like?" It was probably myself. As a matter of fact Howard did a painting for me that Donald Duke used in one of his recent books on the Santa Fe Railroad.

The first chapter is a biography of the painter Howard Fogg. This book is about the artist who made railroading come to life in a way no photographer ever could. This book contains over 180 wonderful paintings by Howard Fogg. Because he liked steam locomotives, Howard Fogg liked big steam, the majority of the illustrations are of steam locomotives. Howard was so detailed in his work you can almost hear and smell the locomotives in these paintings.

The railroads depicted cover the United States coast to coast, but mainly the West. The scenic colors in the background are absolutely beautiful.

There is one criticism I would make, and that is the very small size of print under some of the pictures. Get a magnifying glass out when you read this book. All book reviewers must find something to criticize, right?

If you like either trains or paintings you

will treasure this book. I believe you will not lay it down once you begin reading it.

—Bob Kern

VISIONS OF ARCADIA: *A Centennial Anthology* edited by Gary A. Kovacic. City of Arcadia and Gary A. Kovacic, 2003. 363 pages, photographs. Hard cover, $30.

Visions of Arcadia traces the history of the community from E. J. "Lucky" Baldwin's princely domain to the chicken ranches of the 1920s and '30s, through the post-war residential boom of the 1950s and '60s, to the modern community of today. This is the story of Arcadia's first one hundred years told through a series of personal reminiscences divided into 16 chapters, including three sections of photos. Editor Gary Kovacic describes the book's contents as "a collection of reflections, remembrances, recollections, a few photographs and probably more than a few myths by and about Arcadians..."

Anthologies like this one, though perhaps not scholarly works, provide real insight into the history and development of a community and contain stories and information not found in other types of sources. As the years go by, they grow in value as rare windows on everyday life that flesh out the dry bones of facts and figures.

Kovacic is to be congratulated for pulling together these stories and creating a lasting legacy to everyone who has ever lived in or still lives in Arcadia or its neigh-boring communities.

—Gregory McReynolds

SIERRA MADRE'S OLD MOUNT WILSON TRAIL by John Robinson. First published by the Big Santa Anita Historical Society in 2001. 118 pp, photos, map, endnotes, selective bibliography, paper, $15.00. Order from John Robinson, 1345 Cameo Lane, Fullerton, CA 92831-2509 ISBN 0-9615421-7-9

John Robinson takes the reader on a wonderful trip back through the years of the old Mount Wilson Trail via words and incredible duotones of rare and never seen before images. From the times of the Gabrielino Indians to the Great Hiking Era and then to the decline and rebirth of popularity, this book covers it all.

It's hard to believe this trail was born out of Don Benito Wilson's need for lumber for fence and wine barrel material and later became the most traveled route to the Sierra Madre (San Gabriel) Mountains. The Pacific Electric Railway aided the popularity by dropping off hundreds of weekend warriors at the foot of the trail until World War II broke out. During the war the trail fell into disrepair and seemed doomed to be reclaimed by Mother Nature until it was reopened to the public in 1945. Yet, for nearly twenty more years, the trail remained mostly unused and was devastated by fire and flood. By the 1960's a major restoration of the trail had taken place, making this once famous path a historic landmark.

Robinson captures the reader with his inviting writing style and great images. This book is a "must have" for any history lover and will be read and reread many times over.

—Michael Patris

ORPHANS PREFERRED: *The Twisted Truth and Lasting Legend of the Pony Express*, by Christopher Corbett. New York: Broadway Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 2003. 268 pp. Illustrations, Epilogue, Bibliography and Acknowledgements. ISBN 0-7679-0692-6. Hardback $23.95, Order at www.broadwaybooks.com or www.barnesandnoble.com.

WANTED

—young, skinny, wiry fellows, not over eighteen. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred. Wages $25 per week. Apply—Central Overland Pony Express, Alta Bldg. Montgomery St.

This ad is one of the most famous and often quoted pieces of Pony Express lore. It is said that it was placed in a San Francisco newspaper in March 1860 by Bolivar Roberts,

superintendent of the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company (COC&PPEC), to hire riders for the Pony Express. It captures the spirit and adventure of "the Pony," whose legends have abounded for over one-hundred plus years.

Orphans Preferred is a lively chronicle full of truth and fiction about the Pony. The book is divided into two parts: Part I—"In the Days of the Pony" (to the telegraph); and Part II—"After the Pony" (how the myths and legends were born and survived). In his subtitle, the author hints at the story to come. He presents a number of twisted truths and legends that have taken on a life of their own.

The National Pony Express Association (NPEA) maintains a current list of all known works on the legendary Pony Express. Number 52 in this list (alphabetical by author) of 236 titles is *Orphans Preferred.* Unlike most historically minded purists, Corbett, a Baltimore journalist, intentionally does not clear up historical errors, controversies, ambiguities, hearsay and lies about the Pony. He has instead assembled every (or almost every) imaginable yarn dealing with its 18-month existence. Corbett questions details related to all the firsts: riders, horses and pedigrees, clothing, departure points and times, arrivals and times, Indians encountered, pursuits, skirmishes and deadly shootouts, etc. Factual discrepancies in these legends are put forth for the reader to ponder and to decide what to believe. Many details, the author admits, are unclear because of the passage of time and few individuals who were involved had keen enough memories to pass down the facts totheir chronicler. Also, evidence from the files and reports of COC&PPEC no longer existed to support any "truths"—"twisted" or un-twisted.

Part I regales the reader with many stories about the beginning, the short life and demise of the Pony. Interestingly, the background and lives of its founders, Russell, Majors and Waddell, are well documented as is their enterprise, which also included outfitting wagon trains and hauling freight to Santa Fe, New Mexico for the Army. On October 24, 1861 the telegraph brought a sudden halt to the overland express message-carrying service via horses. In Chapter 7, The Telegraph: "Our Little Friend the Pony is to Run No More," says it all, Pony folded two days later.

Part II deals with the numerous writers and Wild West Shows that awed the public, including royalty, and kept alive the pony riders' adventures. Authors progressively spun larger and larger tales from the small amount of "truth" available to them. Famous yarn spinners included Pony riders Robert "Pony Bob" Haslam and William F. Fisher, a dubious rider in Buffalo Bill Cody and his biographer Don Russell, stagecoach travelers Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton and Mark Twain (in Roughing It), Colonel Will L. Visscher (mostly his opinions, borrowing freely from writings of Colonel Henry Inman, Frank A. Root and William E. Connelley, among others), newspaper hacks, "pulpists" [sic], dime-store novelists, and later, Hollywood writers, all who invented or embellished facts based on faint memories of events that occurred between April 3, 1860 and October 26, 1861. Corbett describes those individuals who were formerly dependent on the Pony Express institution for their livelihood and now eked out a post-Pony existence.

The Pony employed about 80 "young" (60 as a result of the San Francisco ad(?), "not over eighteen" years of age is questionable), "skinny," lightweight as jockeys, "wiry fellows." The service also had approximately 80 "swing" and "home" stations strung out along its 1,970 to 2,000 miles of trail, from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California (to San Francisco by boat), covering eight states of today. In all, it ran about 308 to 330 trips (another uncertain fact), each using about 75 to 80 half-wild ponies averaging 10 days per trip. The Pony hauled about 34,753 pieces of mail in leather pouches called *mochilas* (Spanish for packs or rucksacks), but lost about $500,000 in the process. In the words of chronicler Raymond Settle, "The Pony Express failed in only one respect; it

made no money."

Corbett's story of the Pony Express relies heavily on quotations from notables mentioned above, but also many others. Westerners will find *Orphans Preferred* entertaining, lively and riveting, though some may be put off by its derivative form of relating the tale through traditional folklore using revisionist history.

For Pony Express aficionados, all 236 titles may be found at: http://www.xphomestation.com/xpbooks.html, and if that is not enough, *Orphans Preferred* contains an extensive bibliography, including an additional 96 titles encompassing both the Pony and the telegraph.

—Kenneth Pauley

BOREAL TIES: *Photography and Two Diaries of the 1901 Peary Relief Expedition*, edited by Kim Fairley Gillis and Silas Hibbard Ayer III. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2002. 232 pp. maps, illustrations, notes. Cloth $39.95. Order from University of New Mexico Press, 1720 Lomas Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1591, (800) 249-7737.

In 1899, Robert Peary explored northern Greenland in search of the North Pole. Adverse weather and frostbite slowed the expedition and prompted Peary's wife to undertake a relief expedition in the following year. By 1901, a second relief expedition was commissioned to rescue the Peary family and return them to the United States. Two adventuresome volunteers, Clarence Wyckoff and Louis Bement, chronicled the bad food, ice and cold, and exotic cultures they experienced during their rescue mission. *Boreal Ties* captures the frigid conditions and dangers facing Wyckoff, Bement, and the 1901 Arctic relief expedition in search of Peary and his family.

The photographs and diary descriptions tell a story of a barren landscape and assorted natural inhabitants that included bears, seals, and gulls. The dozens of photographs are vivid and revealing. The diaries of these two members of the relief expedition detail an arctic world of icebergs, walrus, huskies, whales, and Inuit inhabitants. The photographs of these native peoples reveal a hearty lifestyle filled with serenity and gaity amist harsh weather conditions.

The editors' notes and comments highlight the tensions that existed between the participants. Jealousy and rivalries were evident among Peary and members of the relief expedition; idealistic expectations of Wyckoff and Bement gave way to disillusionment over the hardships they encountered; while the incompetence of some crew members led to waste and disharmony.

This travelogue offers a glimpse at an age gone by—a time when only a few places on earth had yet to be explored, and the wonderment of discovering new lands would be then left to a genre of fictional writers like Edgar Rice Burroughs and H.G. Wells. Indeed, readers will find that *Boreal Ties* provides a visual and narrative insight into the earliest stages of Arctic exploration.

—Ronald C. Woolsey