LOS ANGELES WESTERNERS CORRAL
The Branding Iron
J. GOODMAN

WINTER 2006 LOS ANGELES CORRAL NUMBER 246

One of Norton Allen's classic mastheads for Desert Magazine (1953). His distinctive and detailed maps were one of the magazine's other strengths.

Randall Henderson and the Rise and Fall of *Desert Magazine*

by Phil Brigandi

Randall Henderson is proof that Desert Rats are made and not born. The man whose name would become synonymous with *Desert Magazine* was actually born in Iowa on April 12, 1888. At age 19, he rode the rails to California, where he enrolled at the University of Southern California.

Henderson worked his way through college while he studied economics and sociology — two subjects that would fascinate him for the rest of his life. He also found time to serve as student body president, and was the captain of basketball team.

In his senior year, he took a job as a sports writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, working under legendary *Times* columnist Harry Carr. Carr took a liking to Henderson, and offered him some advice—go find a little country newspaper and grow with it.

And that's just what Henderson did. Shortly after his graduation in 1911, he got a job as an apprentice printer on the *Parker Post*, in Parker, Arizona. Before long, the publisher decided to send Randall down the river to take over a new paper he had

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Phil Brigandi's article, *Randall Henderson and the Rise and Fall of Desert Magazine,* is an excellent example of one man's attempt to create a publication that reflected his own personal view. In this case, Henderson's love of the Desert. As he said, " This is to be a friendly, personal magazine written for people of the Desert and their friends and insofar as possible, by Desert people." Our lament is that there is no comparable publication today, especially for those of us who love the Desert. Fortunately the Palm Desert Historical Society has a complete collection of *Desert Magazine* and they have been kind enough to allow scholars to use them. Randall Henderson is portrayed as a somewhat tragic figure in this article which we found interesting but would certainly apply to many people like him who try very hard to give readers the best but find they lose in the end to market forces.

To the above we would like to add some interesting side notes. Randall's two brothers founded the city of Palm Desert and are revered as heroes, not tragic figures and their photos are everywhere in the Palm Desert area. The building that housed the magazine is now a high-end steak house, *LG'S* and the apartment built for the employees of the magazine is now an expensive restaurant, *Jillians.* So if you want to visit these historic sites, be hungry and bring money. In addition we are sure you all know that Randall Henderson was a contributor to *Brand Book Eleven.*

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recently started in the little town of Blythe, California.

Under Henderson's management, the *Blythe Herald* grew. He stayed on through four different changes in ownership and in 1915 he was finally able to buy a half--interest in the paper.

By the time America entered World War I, Henderson was married with a young daughter; but he still felt the pull to do his part. In February, 1918, he joined the Army Air Service (as it was then known). After several delays, he finally got to flight school. He was still there on November 11, 1918, when the Armistice came.

Given the option to drop out without commission, or complete his flight training and become a Second Lieutenant in the Army Reserve, Henderson decided to complete his training. He earned his wings in January, 1919, and received his discharge in March.

Back in Blythe, Ralph Seeley, a local real estate agent, decided to buy himself a surplus military airplane. The only problem was, he didn't know how to fly. So he and Henderson made a deal — in return for flying lessons, Henderson could use the plane.

For a few brief months in 1920, Henderson added barnstormer to his list of accomplishments. "After the newspaper was out each Thursday I spent the weekend barnstorming the desert country at a time when there were no landing fields and passengers were paying $10 for a 10-minute flight," he later recalled. During that time, he made the first flight into the little desert town of Las Vegas.

Not long after that, Ralph Seeley soloed for the first time, and Henderson's adventures as a barnstormer drew to a close.

In 1922, he and a partner bought the daily *Calexico Chronicle* down in Imperial Valley, and Henderson soon became an active and outspoken member of the community. The *Chronicle* prospered; but Henderson had other dreams.

Over the years, Henderson had developed a great love of the desert, spending his free time hiking and camping and exploring. Sometimes he wrote up his travels in his personal column, "Just Between You and Me." In the early 1930s, one of his young reporters, J. Wilson McKenney, started his own desert travel column, "Roamin' Around."

Henderson began dreaming of starting a magazine—a desert magazine. McKenney soon got swept up into his plans. In 1936, they decided to give it a go. "We'll take a grand and glorious whirl at the Desert magazine," he wrote McKenney a few months later, "[and] give it all we've got...."

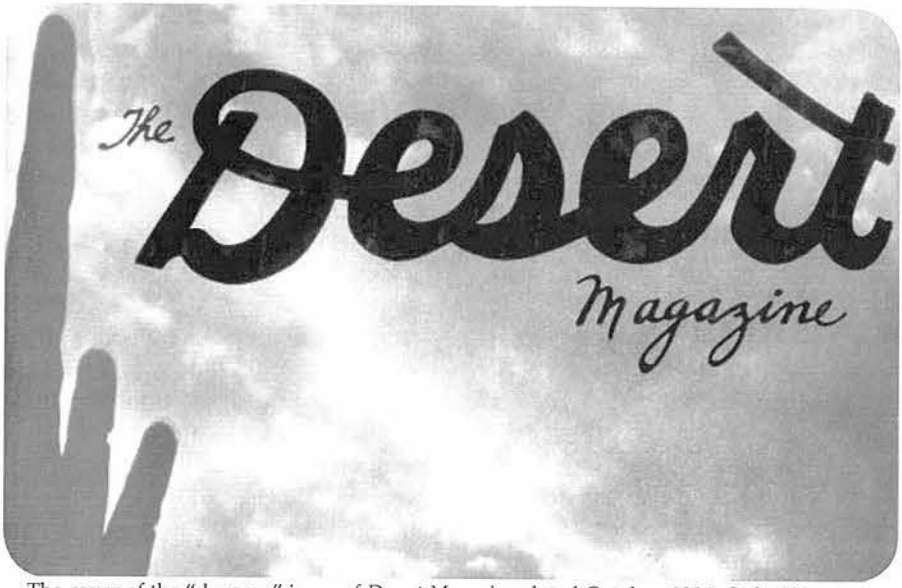
But Henderson was still a businessman. He sold a half interest in the *Calexico Chronicle*, and rounded up some other partners. He also bought a commercial printing outfit in El Centro that would not only produce his magazine, but help provide another source of income during the early years. In the end, he raised $6,000 in capital to launch his dream.

The dummy issue of *Desert Magazine* is dated October, 1936. Besides its saguaro cactus cover, about the only content was the editorial that would become *Desert*'s credo—"There are two Deserts. One is a grim desolate wasteland. It is the home of venomous reptiles and stinging insects, of viscous thorn-covered plants and trees, and of unbearable heat. This is the Desert seen by the stranger speeding along the highway....

"But the ... other Desert—the real Desert —is not for the eyes of the superficial observer, nor the fearful soul or the cynic. It is a land whose character is hidden except to those who come with friendliness and understanding...."

It was this second desert that Henderson proposed to share. "This is to be a friendly, personal magazine," the editorial continues, "written for the people of the Desert and their friends—and insofar as possible, by Desert people."

That idea goes a long way towards explaining the appeal of *Desert Magazine*. Not just to desert dwellers, but to anyone who loved the desert. Henderson scorned the freelance writers who would try their hands at anything. He wanted writers who knew their stuff, and could convey the "feel" of the desert. He wanted a magazine that would encourage its readers to get out and



The cover of the "dummy" issue of *Desert Magazine*, dated October, 1936. Only 100 copies were printed.

explore, experience, and enjoy the desert. He liked to quote an old editor who once said, "I've never been able to edit successfully for an audience of which I am not a member." Henderson loved the desert, and he wanted to share that love with others.

The first issue of *Desert Magazine* (dated November, 1937), hit the newsstands on October 8, 1937. There were just 618 paid subscribers. Within a year, they had 2,400. Within a decade, ten times that many.

Henderson worked endless hours on *Desert Magazine*, demanding perfection in himself and everyone around him. His long-time friend, Wilson McKenney, left perhaps the best description of him:

"Randall Henderson was introverted, self-contained, self-reliant, and not always an easy man to know. In speech, he was often inarticulate when he tried to reveal the humanitarian principles which in his late years dominated his thoughts, but when he talked informally at campfires his language could be colorful and precise. In business matters he was usually hard-headed and rigidly conventional, always the slave of his promise and the conscience of his debt. In matters concerning social responsibility he was self-effacing and studiously receptive of ideas; his reading in sociology and economics was prodigious. In his relationships with people he was often uncompromising and severe, or he could be courteous and friendly, but never gregarious. Considering himself a 'hunt-'n-punch reporter,' he could rise to eloquence on a subject of his choice when alone with his typewriter. Normally undemonstrative, the lines of his face could reflect self-contained joy or anger.

"Scornful of intemperance, he never touched alcohol, ate simply, and detested the cigarette habit which claimed him most of his life. Awed by the wonders of the natural world, from the tiny sprouting seed to the majestic panorama of mountains, he had no tolerance for looters and despoilers. He loved the open spaces and solitude; he could tolerate the teeming cities only with dogged determination."

As the early years of the magazine dragged on without a profit, McKenney was finally forced to give up his share of their dream and move on. Henderson sold his remaining interest in the *Chronicle* and plodded on. He demanded an operation that was first-class all the way, and poured most of the early profits right back into the magazine.

Between the wars, Lt. Randall Henderson had remained active in the Army Reserve. In

Randall Henderson in his Palm Desert office, 1955. Courtesy of Leverne Parker.

the fall of 1942, he was called back to active duty in the Army Air Corps. After several other assignments in the United States and northern Africa, in 1944 he was placed in command of a little refueling base in the middle of the Sahara Desert at Atar, in the French colony of Mauritania. Not long afterward he was promoted to Captain.

Henderson found the Sahara "as drab and lifeless as California's Death Valley." When he could, he explored the surrounding country and met its residents. "After all," he explained to the readers of *Desert Magazine*, "the most interesting phase of any land is the people who dwell there." His columns —passed by military censor—continued to appear throughout the war.

Because of the harsh conditions, men were only stationed at these refueling stations for three months at a time. But Henderson, delighting in both the assignment and the desert, asked for a second hitch. Still, six months on the Sahara was even too much for Randall Henderson, and he was happy to leave at the end of his second tour of duty.

After 19 months overseas, Henderson returned to the United States. By the end of 1944, he was back at his desk at *Desert Magazine*. During his absence, Lucile Harris had served as acting editor while Henderson's name remained on the masthead. She would soon leave to marry one of *Desert*'s regular contributors, Harold Weight.

Henderson's string of regular contributors were another important element of *Desert Magazine*'s success. Some were leading experts in their fields; others brought a unique perspective to the desert.

Leading the list was Marshal South—"a strange man in a strange desert land, with a strange philosophy," as desert historian Horace Parker once described him. South's monthly columns based on his primitive life with his family atop Ghost Mountain in the Anza-Borrego Desert were the most popular features the magazine ever published. He was a man who evoked strong feelings in almost everyone who came in contact with him.

Nell Murbarger, the self-declared "Roving Reporter of the Desert Southwest," and Harold and Lucile Weight, mixed ghost town history with rock collecting. Murbarger's ghost town tales blended historical research with stories from the last aging residents of the old mining towns. Desert artist John Hilton also contributed his share of rock collecting articles.

On the natural history side, Edmund Jaeger and Mary Beall were two of *Desert*'s most popular writers. And then there was Randall Henderson himself, who mixed travel features with natural and human history—along with his personal observations about people, society, and the changing desert in his monthly "Just Between You and Me" column.

As *Desert*'s circulation spread, many other writers began submitting articles. Henderson harvested the best of them, and had a form letter prepared for the rest: "The magazine is published for desert people who already are familiar with the obvious things of the Southwest. Hence we seek reporter's copy which goes behind and beyond the grim mask of the desert land and reveals new and interesting slants on the geography, natural history, resources, scenic objectives, people, history, homes and lore of this region."

Unlike *Arizona Highways*, or *Westways*, or *Sunset* in its early years, *Desert Magazine* was never subsidized. Instead, Randall Henderson built up a wide array of related activities, including a book shop and art gallery at the magazine's headquarters. He also moved into the book publishing business. The first was a little pamphlet by Don Admiral of the Palm Springs Desert Museum, *Desert of the Palms* (1938). Then came *On Desert Trails with Everett Ruess* (1940) the reclusive poet and artist. Later volumes included Nell Murbarger's *Ghosts of the Glory Trail* (1956), and *Sovereigns of the Sage* (1958), and Horace Parker's original *Anza-Borrego Desert Guidebook* (1957). And the commercial printing side of the operation continued to make a significant contribution to the bottom line.

But Henderson had even bigger dreams. As early as 1943, he had been considering a move to the Coachella Valley, and "selecting a blank site on one of the most traveled of the southern California desert highways, and there founding our own desert community, built around the magazine and its printing establishment."

In 1944, he chose a site in a cove south of Palm Springs, where the Pines to Palms Highway meets Highway 111. His younger brother, Cliff Henderson, a born booster who was then running the Pan Pacific Auditorium in Los Angeles, got excited about the idea, and began bringing in other investors. A third brother, Phil Henderson, suggested a name—Palm Desert.

Plans for the new community were announced in October, 1946. Randall Henderson got a 40-acre site for his magazine, and built a Pueblo-style office and printing plant, along with an adjoining apartment building for his employees. Both buildings still stand. The formal opening was held in October, 1948. A sign across the entrance declared, "Friend or Stranger, You are Welcome Here."

The 1950s were the salad days for *Desert Magazine*. All of Henderson's plans and preparation had come together into a unified organization. While some might complain there were a few too many rock hound articles, the circulation continued to climb. But Henderson was getting older now, and had to look to the future.

The decline of *Desert Magazine* might actually be said to have begun on the island of Saipan in 1944. It was there, while fighting with the Second Marines, that Henderson's only son, Randall Henderson, Jr., was killed in action.

"I thought I had a philosophy of life that could face any disaster," Randall Henderson admitted to his daughter, "but I found myself quite unprepared for this one." He had often imagined that some day his bright, thoughtful son would take over *Desert Magazine*, and carry on in his place. Now that possibility was gone forever.

As Randall Henderson entered his 60s, he began to shift some of his editorial duties over to a string of associate editors. But putting out a monthly magazine was still a daunting task. In 1952, he quietly put the magazine up for sale. After several years, and several offers, he finally agreed to sell to Charles Shelton, a southern California newspaper publisher, for about $300,000.

On September 1, 1958, *Desert Magazine* got a new publisher. Gene Conrotto, the last of Henderson's associate editors, became the

editor. Henderson stayed on for six months to help with the transition, continued his "Just Between You and Me" column, and was named Advisory Editor.

Shelton promised no radical changes in the magazine, but he soon began taking *Desert* in new directions. It began to resemble a lifestyle magazine, with monthly sections on desert gardening and new products. Even the travel articles began to read more like chamber of commerce pieces. "[T]hey want a change of pace in my stories," Nell Murbarger complained to Henderson, "... [with] less of the personal adventure material, [and] fewer rugged trips...." Shelton also began limiting appearance by regular contributors such as Murbarger and Edmund Jaeger. One reader complained that the magazine seemed to have "left the campfire and put in central heating."

About a year after he retired, Henderson asked that his name be dropped as Advisory Editor. He felt he hadn't been able to give all that much advice to the new owners. Now only his monthly column remained.

Moving into the 1960s, Henderson grew increasingly disenchanted with Shelton's regime. "Both editorially and in business policy they are slowly strangling an institution which I spent 21 years building," he told Nell Murbarger. "It is rather hard to sit by and watch this tragedy."

Henderson's final break with the magazine came with May, 1962 issue. It was filled with ads and articles promoting the new two-wheeled motorized "Tote-Gotes" (and similar motor scooters) as the new way to get out and explore the wilderness.

Novelist and travel writer Erle Stanley Gardner captured the magazine's new attitude towards the wilderness in an editorial in that same issue—"Who Owns the Outdoors?" He argued that public lands should be open "so that the greatest number of people can derive the greatest enjoyment from the natural resources...." He scolded the Desert Protective Council (which Henderson had helped to found in 1954) for wanting to restrict open travel on the desert, branding it a "radical" idea, based merely on "esthetic grounds."

Why, he asked, should it be "illegal ... to take a rubber-tired vehicle any place they want to go in the desert country?"

It was, said Henderson, "a complete deviation from the conservation policies I have supported." He sold the last of stock, and cut all his ties with the magazine he had founded a quarter of a century before. It was one of the saddest days in his life.

About that same time, Chuck Shelton was growing weary of the monthly magazine grind, and started looking for a new owner. But in a decision that would further hasten *Desert*'s decline, he decided to sell only the magazine, while keeping the commercial printing operation, the publishing business, the art gallery, and the book shop.

On June 1, 1963, Jack Pepper, a former Las Vegas newspaperman, bought the name, subscription list and files of *Desert Magazine*, and moved the offices to a modern building in Palm Desert. His wife, Choral Pepper, who had already been writing for the magazine, became its editor. The Peppers continued the move towards more commercial content, with chamber of commerce-type features on desert destinations, and a notable increase in the space given over to advertising.

Desert's circulation, which had not been keeping pace with the growth of Southern California and other parts of the Desert Southwest, began to fall even further behind. By the mid-1960s, there were fewer paid subscribers than in the years after World War II.

Without the related businesses to help support it, *Desert Magazine*'s finances began to decline as well. In 1968, Choral Pepper sold her half interest to the Bill Knyvett, who along with his wife, Joy, had been the magazine's typesetters. (This "sale" was rumored to have actually been made to settle the magazine's growing debt to the Knyvetts.)

Bill Knyvett continued as co-publisher with Jack Pepper until 1973, when he and his wife became the sole owners of *Desert Magazine*. While the Knyvetts tried to bring the magazine back to its earlier ideals, both paid circulation and especially newsstand sales continued to fall.

Finally in 1979 the Knyvetts sold *Desert Magazine* to a new group of investors calling

themselves Cactus Paperworks, Inc. Under editor Donald MacDonald, the magazine drifted off into all sorts of new directions, including features from deserts all around the world. Gone were the regular contributors with their close ties to the desert and its people.

The magazine quietly changed hands several times in 1981, finally landing with a publisher of several regional magazines. While they kept a post office box in Palm Desert for show, the editorial offices were actually in Encinitas, just "two blocks from the ocean."

The last regular issue of *Desert Magazine* was dated December, 1981. Six months later, a July, 1982 issue appeared under the ownership of Lifespan, Inc., a San Diego publisher. Where previous editors had at least paid lip service to Randall Henderson and his ideals, the new editor announced a clean break — "Henderson's ideas fit well with the old desert, with the desert he first encountered. But with the new desert, a new style had to be found."

It was Lifespan's first and only issue.

The final sad chapter in the death of *Desert Magazine* began in 1983, when D.W. Grantham of Josuha Tree acquired the rights to the old name and files, and started the magazine up again. It is difficult to convey how bad these last few issues were. They began as a mix of typed and even handwritten text, and fuzzy photocopies from earlier issues. The first few issues were not even printed, simply run off on a photocopier!

Later Grantham was able to have the whole thing typeset and printed—with even a couple of color covers—but after less than two years, he gave up. His final issue is dated June-July, 1985. A bankruptcy sale followed. *Desert Magazine* was gone for ever.

Fortunately Randall Henderson did not live to see any of *Desert*'s last, painful years. He died on July 4, 1970, at the age of 81.

For almost half a century, *Desert Magazine* was a familiar part of the American Southwest. It grew, thrived, faded, and eventually failed. Yet it is still remembered and (what's more important) read, even today.

Desert's demise may have been inevitable, as the desert and the publishing world changed around it. But everyone who loves the desert lost something in its passing.

Suggested Reading

Randall Henderson:

- *On Desert Trails, Today and Yesterday* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1961)

- *Sun, Sand and Solitude. Vignettes from the Notebook of a Veteran Desert Reporter* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1968)

- "The Desert Was Our Beat" (in) *Brand Book Number 11* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners, 1964)

J. Wilson McKenney:

- *Desert Editor . . . the story of Randall Henderson and Palm Desert* (Georgetown [CA]: Wilmac Press, 1972)

Phil Brigandi:

- *Barnstorming the Desert. The Life of Randall Henderson, Founder of* Desert Magazine *and a Pioneer Pilot of the Desert Southwest* (Henderson [NV]: Howard W. Cannon Aviation Museum)

. . . and, of course, the old *Desert Magazine* itself.

Nagasaki—general view in river valley. Center of town and harbor less damaged. Courtesy of author.

Photos of Nagasaki

by Sid Gally

These photos of Nagasaki were taken in December 1945 or early 1946 when I was serving in the United States Navy. I had graduated from Caltech with a degree in Electrical Engineering and was able to get a direct commission in the Naval Reserve as an Ensign in 1942. I taught principles of radar and practical radar at both the Harvard and MIT radar schools which trained officers for radar assignments. Other than a brief trip across the Atlantic and back in 1944 on a destroyer escort, I was not exposed to the dangers of wartime. In early 1945, then a lieutenant, I was assigned to the commander of a new destroyer squadron as staff radar officer. The atomic bombing of Japan took place while I was in this position and in residence at the Boston Navy Yard. While at Harvard, a friend and I had surmised that work on an atomic weapon was underway as we knew scientists who vanished to a post office box in New Mexico and the subject had been discussed when we had studied chemistry in college. I was excited about the technical achievement and read the Smythe Report avidly. I was pleased the war had ended for our destroyer squadron was destined for the invasion of Japan as radar picket ships, a vulnerable duty. I later changed my mind as to the necessity of the bombing.

In late 1945 after shakedown cruises and training with the new destroyers, the squadron was sent to Japan to oversee some of the return from other lands of Japanese soldiers on Japanese ships. I found that the Japanese people had accepted the surrender after the Emperor had acted and I never felt hostility or danger in walking around Japanese towns. Japan was in bad shape as our conventional bombing had destroyed major cities. Food was scarce. Sanitation was bad as sewage was used as fertilizer and was barged out to sea. The harbors were so contaminated that some of our sailors became ill without ever going ashore. Petroleum, all imported, was almost gone when the war ended as our subs were sinking the ships bringing it in. We were based in Sasebo in southern Japan and on at least two occasions went to Nagasaki. I remember going ashore at the Deshima dock. That has his-

Nagasaki—general view. Courtesy of author.

torical significance as Deshima was where the Dutch were based from the 1600s on as the only foreigners allowed in Japan.

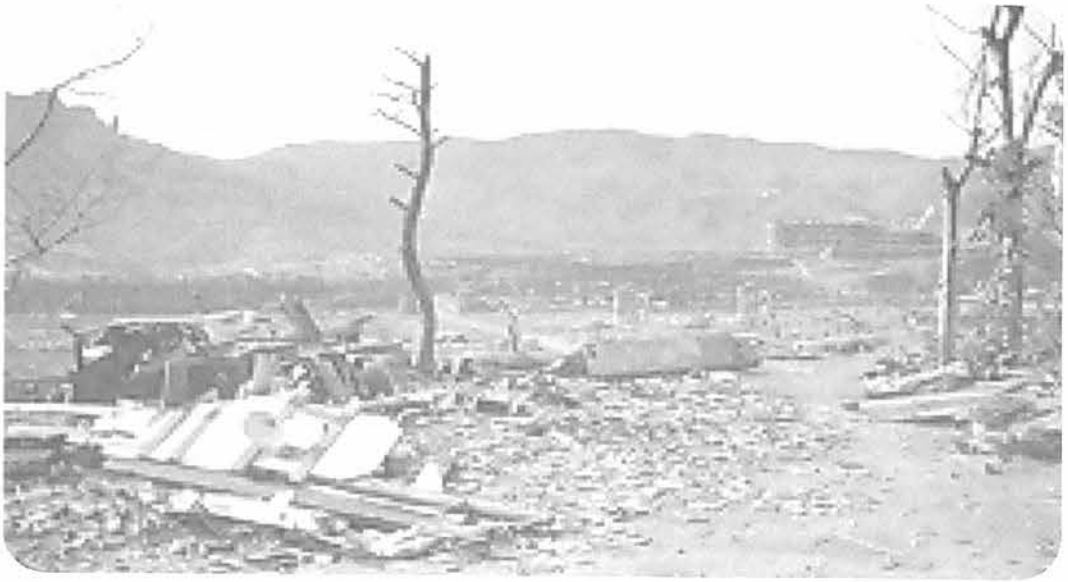
I was able to drive and walk around the area devastated by the atomic bomb. It was detonated above a valley which seemed to contain many industrial operations, but also homes, schools, hospitals and the university. Damage in the downtown area of Nagasaki was isolated as much was shielded by hills. Some of my photos show the area pretty well wiped out. Some reinforced concrete buildings like the university hospital and a school were standing but top floors were crushed in and the interiors blown out. I may have sent a picture of a gas holder leaning like a hand pushed on it. In the grounds of the university hospital I found a roll of negatives and later had them developed. The photos showed a nurse standing with her family in front of the undamaged hospital buildings. That personalized the tragedy for me. After learning of Japan's dire straights

Japanese submarine I53 being escorted out to sea by US Navy ships to be scuttled (along with others.) Rumor was to keep from hands of Soviets. Courtesy of author.

Bent stacks at Hospital power plant. Courtesy of author.

and seeing how many civilians were killed, I came to the conclusion that some further negotiations could have brought about surrender. Our momentum was too strong and the bombing of Nagasaki after Hiroshima seems now not a necessary move. I included a close-up photo of a Japanese man wearing a dark cap. That was Captain Tagami of the Japanese navy who was one of our liaison officers. I knew he was a sub captain and find on the Internet that he captained the I-25 which attacked ships on the west coast, even in the Columbia River in Oregon. There is a photo of a large Japanese submarine. Our ships participated in "Operation Road's End" where on April 1, 1946, we escorted a group of submarines out to sea where they were one-by-one scuttled. We understood the intent was to keep them out of the hands of the Russians. One in the group was the I-58 which sank the USS Indianapolis on July 30, 1945.

It is interesting that my son is now an associate professor at the University of Tokyo and that I have two beautiful granddaughters, half Japanese. They have been in California for two weeks and as I write, are flying back to Tokyo. They live in Yokohama.



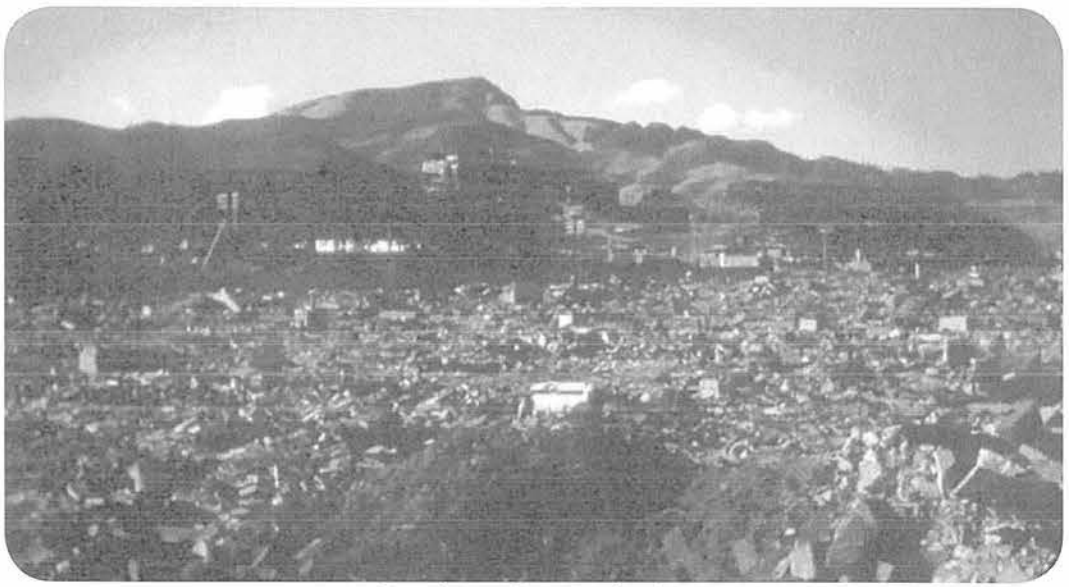
View across valley. Courtesy of author.

Nagasaki Medical University Hospital. Courtesy of author.

Industrial area of Nagasaki. Courtesy of author.

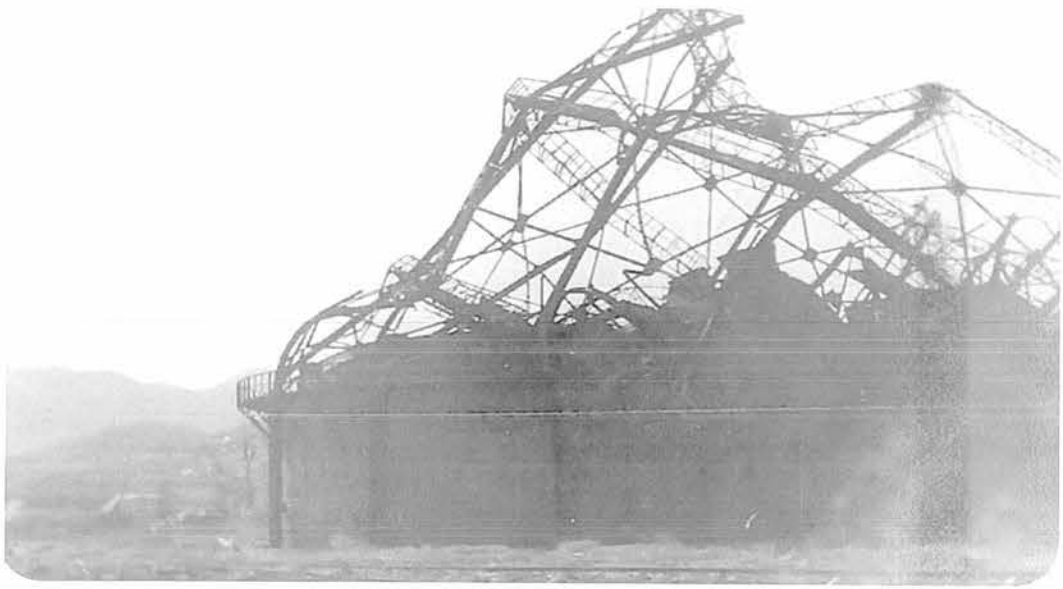
Shiroyama Primary School about 500m from hypoccenter. Courtesy of author.

View northwest across valley. Courtesy of author.



General view. Courtesy of author.

Industrial Structure. Courtesy of author.



Gas holder. May have been about 250m from hypocenter. Courtesy of author.

Remnants of machine shop. Courtesy of author.

Capt. Tagami acting as a liasion officer with US Navy. Attacked Oregon with sub I25 in 1941. Courtesy of author.

Trip to Carrizo Stage Station Site

Between Christmas and New Year's my wife Diane and I decided to visit the site of the Carrizo Stage Station on the Southern Immigrant Road. This road is best known as the route followed by Butterfield Stage route and the "Jackass Mail." Because it lies within the boundaries of Anza Borrego State Park we stopped at the park Visitor's Center to ask about road conditions, etc. The two volunteers, both of whom had been to the site many times informed us of the following concerns: First we could not drive to the site because a mile or so before the site we would encounter a swamp in which we would certainly get stuck and probably lose our Jeep completely in the quicksand. When asked about walking the last mile or so, we were told to be prepared for a very sticky and wet experience and of course watch out for that quicksand. We were then informed that the site lies within the Carrizo Impact Area which still contains live bombs, etc. and hinted that we would be putting our lives at risk or possibly arrested. However, if we somehow survived all that, the site had been completely covered over by the last research team and there was nothing to see anyway. All this made us even more determined to go. After walking the stream bed we realized we were not equipped for walking in water but plan to go back, walk the stream, check it out for Jeep travel and get to the site one way or another. All of this seemed very strange because groups are taken to the site on a regular basis. When we asked if we could talk to the leader of such a group in order to ask a few questions we were told that would not be possible.

We will visit the site and our goal is an article for the *Branding Iron* on this subject.

If any of the Westerners know anything about the Southern Immigrant Road or related subjects please contact me at my email address.

Tom Tefft
trtefft@aol.com

Photograph by Larry Boerio.

July Meeting Speaker James Sandos

July Meeting

University of Redlands professor, James Sandos, addressed the corral on the treatment of the Spanish-mission policy toward the Native American. Sandos asserted that a view of the mission system as an idyllic, paternalistic treatment of the Native American evolved from the time of Helen Hunt Jackson's famous novel, *Ramona*. A post-World War II extreme counterpart interpreted the mission system as exploitative of the Native American. Sandos posited that his own published works were a centrist position between these two camps.

The writings of Professor Sandos have focused on the Native American experience in terms of religious conversion, and as a captive labor force in building the mission structure. His approach to the evidence has elicited criticism from all camps, which Sandos believes was a fundamental result of proposing a centrist view about the mission story.

Professor Sandos presented a broad overview on the writings of the mission system. The earliest biographies of Father Serra, along with the wide popularity of *Ramona*, melded fact with fiction in portraying the mission system in celebratory terms, emphasizing the altruistic motives of the mission padres. Conversely, Sandos referenced Sherburn Cook and Carey McWilliams in presenting an alternative view, which suggests the mission system was detrimental at best, and cruel at worst. Sandos concedes that Cook and McWilliams were not historians, but nonetheless, their views represented a popular contrary interpretation of the mission system.

Sandos concluded that the mission system was well intended, not a cruel institution, although there were adverse consequences for the Native American in terms of population decline. "Scholarship must move beyond the polarized camps of nihilism or triumphalism in order to think clearly about mission history," he asserted.

Unfortunately, Sandos never discussed scholarship that has been written in the last fifty years since McWilliams and Cook, nor did he present an overview of the historical circumstances that have shaped recent scholarship. Certainly, any discussion of the mission system needs to bring the story to the present. Perhaps Professor Sandos will provide another provocative discussion on recent historiography in order to assess the state of academia today.

August Meeting

Mary Lou Pozzo is a retired law librarian and is active in several historical associations. She has recently written, *Founding Sisters: Life Stories of Tujunga's Early Women Pioneers, 1886-1926*. This important work chronicles the lives of 38 women who have been important to the development of the Little Landers Colony, a uniquely utopian colony in southern California's early history. She credits fellow westerners Robert Blew and Gary Turner for their encouragement in researching and writing. Pozzo's discussion centered on several of these early Tujunga pioneer women.

Mary Lou discussed the importance of the railroad in the development of the Tujunga settlement. Against the backdrop of lemons and oranges, the Little Landers Colony began as an agricultural community, encouraging people to travel west to join this cooperative settlement. William Ellsworth Smythe initiated the little lands movement

Photograph by Larry Boerio.

August Meeting Speaker Mary Lou Pozzo

Photograph by Larry Boerio.

September Meeting Speaker Paul Bryan Gray

and became the inspiration behind the early western colonial developments.

Ms. Pozzo detailed the evolution of the colony through the use of rare photos of the buildings, roads, and panoramas of the Tujunga region. The region included an outdoor pavilion and sanitarium, and the community offered weekly square dances, boating activities, and church events. Women managed stores and retail shops, many of them transplants of the Midwest. The mild southern California climate was an inducement for many, including 300 lbs. Anna Adams, who shed the weight with healthy food and daily exercise. Some of the important women highlighted were musician and band leader Gladys Maygrove; photo colorist and photographer Alice Lanson; promoter and booster Edna Buck; school teacher and amateur photographer, Nora Millspaugh; mountain resort and ranch owner, Nelly Colby; and Aida McGroarty, wife of L.A. *Times* columnist, John Stephen McGroarty

Unfortunately, the Little Landers colony struggled because of the unpredictable economic cycles of boom and bust, along with brush fires and the growing attraction of other suburban areas in southern California. However, many of the landmarks and founding pioneers live on in Mary Lou's book, and for Westerners, in her wonderful summer presentation.

September Meeting

Paul Bryan Gray has practiced law in southern California for several years. His important work on Forrester vs. Pico has earned several awards for historical scholarship. He is currently working on a study of Francisco P. Ramirez, an influential southern California politicos and editor of the 1850s organ, *El Clamor Publico*. He gave a special thanks to fellow westerners Doyce B. Nunis and Father Francis Weber for their support and influence in his studies. His September presentation centered on Ygnacio Sepulveda, a central figure in mid-nineteenth century southern California politics.

The Sepulveda family had deep roots in southern California history, dating to the 18th century and evolving into an elite Californio family of the Mexican era. Not unlike many rancho families, the Sepulveda family lost their cattle empire during the years following California statehood. Proof of land title led to protracted litigation and exorbitant attorney fees. Extravagance and droughts also accelerated the decline of the ranchos.

Ygnacio Sepluveda received a private education in Massachusetts, worked in Joseph Lancaster Brent's law office, and became an ardent defender of the Democrat party and friend of Antonio Coronel. He was elected to the state legislature in the early 1860s. He was elected a county judge and

later won a seat as district judge in the post Civil War era.

According to Gray, Sepulveda often courted favor from the ruling class. He joined the Maximilian regime during the tumultuous years leading to the overthrow of the French. He represented American business interests as an investment broker in Mexico City. Ygnacio courted the Mexican and American elites through high profile organizations and among the social circles of Mexico City. He developed a cordial relationship with the Porfirio Diaz regime, and worked for American interests to develop a casino and lottery. In 1896, he was formally appointed an American liaison to Mexico City. Sepulveda rubbed shoulders with the Mexican elite while he maintained close ties with the American embassy in the years leading to the Mexican Revolution. By 1913, however, the volatile nature of Mexican politics had left Sepulveda near bankruptcy and with no political support among the new revolutionary leaders. He returned to Los Angeles and lived quietly until his death in 1916.

If anything, Ygnacio Sepulveda was a shooting star against a black backdrop, a man who connected two cultures, two countries, and was a bridge between a frontier era and the twentieth century. Paul Gray's presentation did a wonderful job in illuminating that star within southern California history.

November Meeting

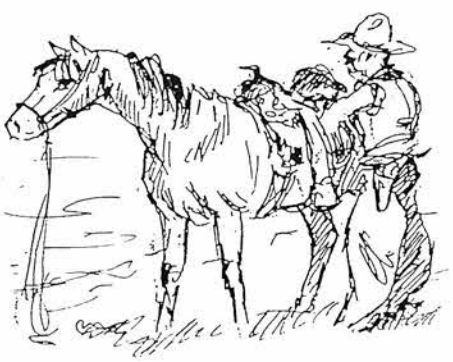
Robert Ferguson is a graduate of U.S.C. and practices business litigation in southern California. He is an adjunct professor of astronomy at the University of La Verne. He has had a longstanding interest in the western history and has worked on cattle ranch. Bob Ferguson's presentation centered on his grandfather, Frank Harris Ferguson, a true western cowboy who lived during the frontier days of cattle ranching in the Far West.

Frank Harris Ferguson was born in 1854 at Sweetwater, Tennessee. He was the seventh of seven children, and as a teenager worked in the mines of Colorado. Frank Ferguson traveled to Prescott, Arizona and operated a cattle ranch, Quarter Circle 81. It was at the apex of cattle ranching, which included the long drives, and the age of western lore regarding "Old Joe." Ferguson related anecdotal stories based on his grandfather's recollections. He told tales of a snipe hunt, a gunfight with a wrangler, frontier relay races on downtown Gurley Street, and vaqueros and wranglers who worked on the ranch. He even retold a "Big Foot" story of a bear who roamed the area.

Photograph by Larry Boerio.

November Meeting Speaker Robert Ferguson

Bob Ferguson's tales of his grandfather's ranch was complemented with several slides of the ranch, downtown storefronts and saloons. It is a vanishing frontier that is kept alive in the memoirs of cowboys like Frank Harris Ferguson.



Corral Chips

John Robinson at a Little Landers Historical Society Presentation. John gave a slide show on his new book *Gateways into Southern California*. Lloyd Nitt, president of the Society, is pictured with John.

Congratulations to **POWELL GREENLAND** on the publication of his new book, *As Troubled Dream: Richard Bard's Struggle to Build a Harbor at Hueneme, California*. This obscure but important subject deals with the collision between Bard's dream to build a harbor and the partisan politics involving the city of Ventura. The book is published through Ooive Press Publications.

MARY LOU POZZO had a well-attended reception for her book signing at Dawson's Book Shop this past summer. Her work, *Founding Sisters: Life Stories of Tujunga's Early Women Pioneers, 1886-1926*, has drawn widespread attention for bringing to light a forgotten, yet significant aspect of southern California's early settlement.

There goes **ABE HOFFMAN** on another expedition, only this time trying to find the Manly-Rogers Trail! He and his wife Sue, along with corresponding member **SID BLUMNER** and his wife Helene, attended the annual Death Valley 49ers Annual Encampment in November.

Ride 'em Slow !

Well, boys, I can't begin to tell you
What you're comin' means to me
This is somethin I just have to do
Elsewise I'll never, ever be free

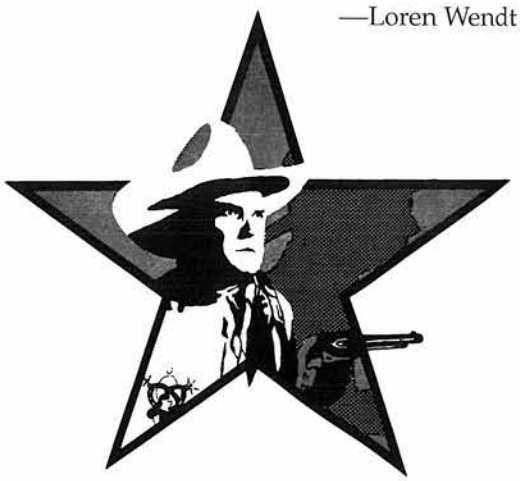
Gotta give myself up this way
That durn Sheriff in Durango
Is bound to have his say
N' he's right as you all know

Don't get into trouble on my account
You all know I broke the law
Sure, I knew what that was all about
In spite of the trouble we all saw

Thanks for your prayers and such
Mebbe I'm gonna hang, I just don't know
But runnin' has proved to be too much
So, boys, ride 'em easy, ride 'em slow

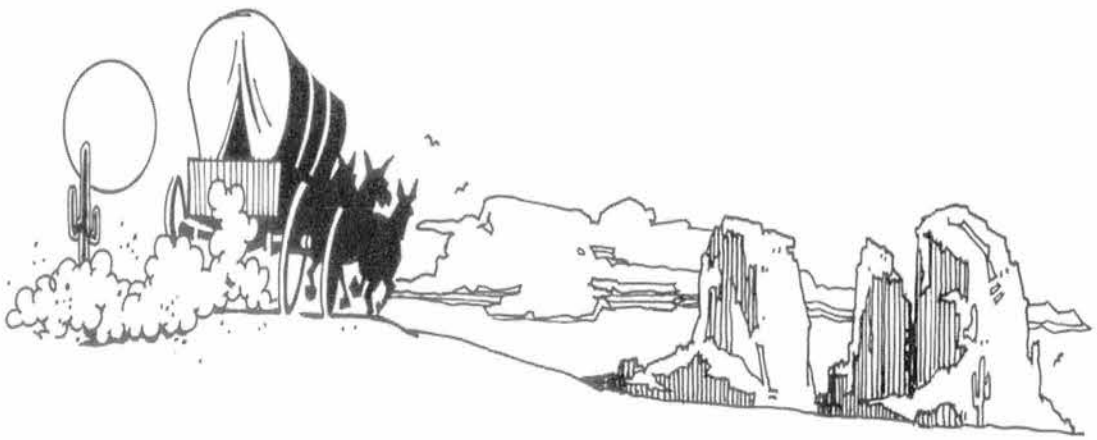
Don't go speedin' through this hectic life
It'll leave you with nothin' left to show
Hurryin' is just gonna cause a lot of strife
SO, LISTEN UP, RIDE 'EM EASY, RIDE 'EM SLOW !!!!!!

—Loren Wendt



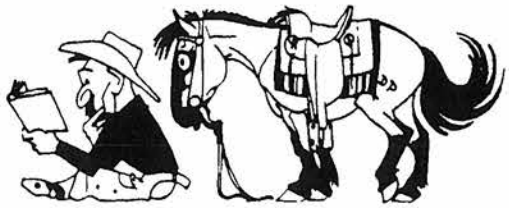
Ode to The Pioneers

Now there was a group that could write
songs and play the guitar, the bass, all the strings.
They had fun, were poetic, and worked night and day,
and were best at harmonizing.
As the years have gone by, many groups can sing songs,
some: Vocalist Group of the Year.
But none quite match up or have lasted as long as the Sons of the Pioneers.
In decades past, there's been many a group that could sing and sell records for sure.



Their entertainment is great and the profits recoup as their sound and their records endure.
But none have the tone, the style, or the class
of that group formed so long ago.
They surely can't write with the realistic old dash,
with that same warm inner glow
that came with the sound of the old Pioneers, so mellow and true and sincere.
Anyone can listen, just stop now and hear their message, their voice, it's so clear.
For Alabama is great and their records are fine,
the Statlers are equal of course.
Kentucky Headhunters are tops, what sound, what rhyme,
the Texas Rose Band has no remorse.
Brooks and Dunn win country music awards,
it seems like every year.
They sing with pride and hit all their high chords,
the crowds do certainly cheer.
For the songs they sing and the music they make
is far above average, just hear....
But they can't compare in sound, for God's sake,
to the Sons of the Pioneers.
So as we dance, drank beer and recalled
the big names in country sound.
There was no disagreement, the best group
of all,
one stood the highest ground.
For sheer harmony, richness and style,
ahead of their time by years.
They had all the others beat by a mile,
the Sons of the Pioneers.
But where were they from and when did they start?
How did they become the best?
Where did they get that special sound from the heart?
Who began these boys on their quest?
'Twas Doc knew the answers, for he knew them all
by name and by tone of their voice.
So he reminisced, with one more long neck on call,
speaking slowly his eyes they grew moist.

—Gary Turner



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL . . .

ORANGE COUNTY PLACE NAMES A to Z, by Phil Brigandi Sunbelt Publications, San Diego, 2006. Softbound, 114 pp., select bibliography. $12.95. Order from Sunbelt Publications, Inc. P.O. Box 191126, San Diego, CA 92159-1126.

Phil Brigandi is an outstanding young historian who has already made his mark with some fifteen books to his credit. His areas of historical expertise include the history of Orange County, the Ramona country, and Anza-Borrego State Park. Phil was formerly the curator of the Ramona Bowl Museum in Hemet, and since 2003 has held the post of Archivist for Orange County at the Old County Courthouse in Santa Ana.

Phil's latest work includes a brief overview of Orange County's history, followed by an alphabetical listing and descriptions of the County place names. Although essentially a reference work, the small volume is a fascinating read. The sagas of Santa Ana, Anaheim, Orange, Fullerton and other Orange County cities are covered in adequate but not exhausting detail. Also covered are school districts, military bases, creeks, canyons, hot springs, and all manner of places, both current and long forgotten.

Besides the well-known place names, there are many entries covering locations of bygone days. Failed townsites such as Fruitville in south Santa Ana, Gospel Swamp between Santa Ana and Fountain Valley, Carlton in today's Yorba Linda are briefly described. Gopher City was a small community centered on a packing plant notable for burrowing rodents. *Peor Es Nada*, a sandy area along the Santa Ana River south of Placentia once considered worthless, was given the nickname meaning "Nothing Is Worse" in Spanish. Holy Jim Canyon, a name still in use today, honors "Cussin' Jim Smith" who allegedly seldom uttered a sentence without a swear word.

Anyone with an interest in southern California history will find this little book valuable, informative, well written, and—in regard to some entries—humorous.

—John Robinson

ZANE GREY: His Life, His Adventures, His Women, by Thomas H. Pauley. Urbana and Chicago, I11: University of Illinois Press, 2005. 385 pp. Illustrations, Map, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Hardcover, $34.95. Order from University of Illinois Press, 1325 South Oak Street, Champaign, Illinois, 61820-6903. (217) 333-9071: www.press.uillinois.edu.

Zane Grey was probably America's most popular and widely read author from his first successful novel. *Heritage of the Desert* in 1910 and throughout the 1920's and much of the 1930's though he was regarded with disdain by most of the literary establishment. Through his novels, non-fiction books along with Frank Gruber's, *Zane Grey, a Biography* (1970) (the best known Grey biography and a "puff piece" compared to this one). Grey came to be known as an excellent athlete, world-class angler, outstanding adventurer, a real man of the outdoors. He was loyal to his wife Dolly who encouraged him, took care of his finances, and proofread his manuscripts. Grey neither smoked nor drank and had a negative opinion of the uninhibited young women of the flapper era. He did bring along young women on most of his adventures beginning in his expedition to Rainbow Ridge in 1913. But his relationships with them were considered as friendly and platonic and seldom written about.

Regarding "His Life" (included in the title), Pauley's biography covers the entire life of Zane Grey, his background, childhood, youth, college days, dental practice,

early writing struggles, his successes, his dark moods. It includes material not covered by earlier biographers and cites newly available material, mostly through letters and diaries from Grey, Dolly, and others that reveal aspects of Grey's life not earlier disclosed.

Regarding "His Adventures," Pauley covers his trips to the Southwest, Long Key in Florida, Catalina (before he lived there), Tahiti, and other places. His battles with the Tuna Club in Avalon are highlighted as is his striving to achieve world records as a fisherman—which he did. Throughout his adventures, he was always accompanied by two or more young women.

That brings this review to what Pauley calls, "His Women." It was no secret that Grey's wife Dolly often stayed home while Grey went adventuring. Although always the loyal wife, Dolly did not accept her husband's female companions without problems in their marriage. The most significant difference from former Grey biographies is the author's relationship with the girls. Pauley early on writes:

> *...women regularly accompanied him on his trips, sometimes as many as four. The few scholars aware of these relationships have assumed that they were paternal and platonic, but they were, in fact, romantic and sexual.*

Pauley's book seems to back this statement. This is most interesting since Grey's heroes and heroines were quite chaste. A romantic episode in a Grey novel could be characterized with the hero and his beloved on a mountainside overlooking the desert at sunset astride their horses and holding hands. Illustrations throughout the biography indicate "the girls" as Dolly called them, were all quite attractive. Take a look. His friendships with them were long lasting.

The book contains nine chapters, and has excellent, easy to locate end notes listed by chapter and page. The bibliography is lengthy but admittedly incomplete and there is an index. All in all, a well-done and readable book. Grey fans and lovers of the western novel will enjoy this biography of a complex man though some Grey fans may be bothered by Pauley's disclosure of the novelist's relationships with "the girls."

—Willis Osborne

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. Available September 2003, hardback $23.95, Order at www.broadwaybooks.com or www.barnesandnoble.com.

Orphans Preferred is a lively chronicle full of truth and fiction about the Pony. The books 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 tim es, Indians encountered, pursuits, skirmishes and deadly shoot outs, 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 to their chroniclers. 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 sto-

ries 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 1/2 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