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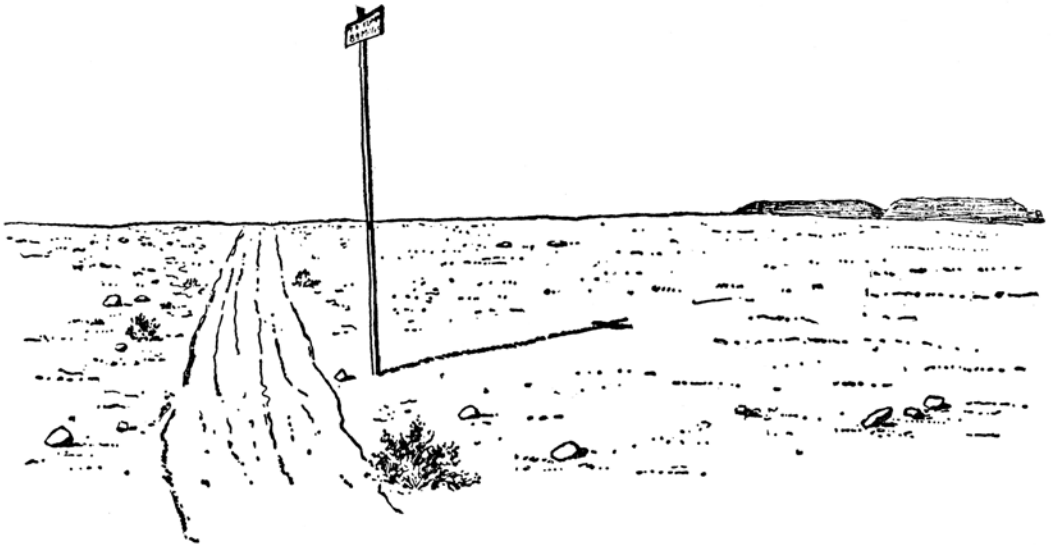

Good Water and Good Roads:
The Story of the Desert Signpost Campaign

By Anne E. Collier

THIRTY DEAD BODIES ON NEVADA DESERT.

Corpses Lying in Groups of Four or Half a Dozen. In Most Instances So Torn by Coyotes and Buzzards as to be Unrecognizable—Water of "Dead Man's Well" Tempted Several to Their Deaths.

The headline said it all. Thirty bodies had been found in the eighty mile stretch of desert landscape between Las Vegas, Nevada, and the California line. This horrific discovery had a profound affect on one man, who in the interest of the new Salt Lake and Los Angeles Railroad and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had embarked on a three-month surveying trip along the proposed railroad route in the winter of 1903. After witnessing the gruesome sight, George W. Parsons began what would become a nearly fifteen year crusade to have sign-posts leading travelers to water installed in the deserts of California, Arizona and Nevada. Parsons knew of the potential loss of life in the un-

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The Branding Iron is always seeking articles of 2,500 words or less dealing with every phase of the history of the Old West and California. Contributions from both members and friends are welcome.

Editor's Corner . . .

As fall melts away, the desert begins to open itself up again. And there is a definite desert feel to this issue of *The Branding Iron*, with articles about desert water holes, Willian S. Hart, and the forgotten little resort of Ribbonwood in the Santa Rosa Mountains.

The Ribbonwood article comes from Steve Lech, who has been a guest at our Corral meetings in the past. By sheer determination, Steve has been transforming himself in recent years into the leading Riverside County historian. He is the author of several books, including *Along the Old Roads*, which traces the history of the Riverside County area from 1772 to 1893, when the county was formed.

More recently – since no one else seemed willing to do it – he has launched his own historical journal for the Riverside and San Bernardino counties, *The Inland Chronicler*. It features articles by a number of local historians from the Inland Empire.

As with most historical publications, the *Chronicler* would welcome your support as both a subscriber and a contributor. For more information, contact:

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Desert Signposts . . .

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forgiving desert. He also knew life-saving water was available in the desert, if properly located and marked.

George Whitwell Parsons was born August 26, 1850 in the District of Columbia. His great-grandfather was a patriot at Bunker Hill during the Revolutionary War and his father a graduate of Yale Law School. Educated in a seminary in Pennsylvania, George graduated from prestigious Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute with an emphasis in accounting and bookkeeping. A devout Episcopalian, George aspired to achieve the level of success he admired in his father' and grandfather's lives.

Initially George studied law at his father's office in New York, but health issues required him living in a warmer climate. After enduring two hurricanes seasons, in 1876 George settled in San Francisco. He found work at the National Gold Bank and Trust firm until its collapse at the end of 1879. He and a friend then decided to try mining and moved to Tombstone, a booming silver mining camp in Arizona Territory.

It was during his seven year stay in Tombstone for which George W. Parsons is best known. As an educated man, he consistently maintained a journal for fifty years, offering historians an insight to daily events during the early years of that tumultuous mining town.

Ironically, it was because of his education and eastern social skills that George was never quite accepted into the Tombstone mining fraternity, regardless of the years he endured back-breaking work as a hard rock miner, dutifully helped to save Tombstone during two devastating fires, or his years spent in search of "renegade Indians." Finally, in 1887, after losing twenty-seven of his friends, "murdered, one after another, by Apaches," he moved to Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles Parsons looked forward to the formality he had missed while living in southeastern Arizona. Yet once again Parsons experienced a feeling of disapproval from those with whom he interacted. Although he had come from a respectable family and had an admirable education and background, many in Los Angeles viewed him as a miner, a "desert rat" who hailed from uncivilized country.

George was excessively involved in many respectable fraternal, social, business and philanthropic societies in the city, however it was not until the end of the nineteenth century when he finally found his niche. As a charter member of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, he could blend the best of his life experiences and gain the ultimate professional respect of his peers. In 1893, Parsons was elected as Chairman of the Committee Mines and Mining, a position which perfectly suited him.

During the early twentieth century, the eastern portion of Southern California and southern Nevada experienced a resurgence of mining in the Mohave Desert. The influx resulted in miners heading into Death Valley, California, an area aptly named since the temperatures there average 116 degrees in the summer and reach as high as 134 degrees, yet is below freezing at night, during the winter months.

Travel between states was limited to wagons, horses or on foot, and as the mining activity increased between the two states, interest in building a rail line between Salt Lake City, Utah, and Los Angeles intensified. In 1901, along with his other duties, George Parsons was the Chamber of Commerce's Road Committee and was president of the geological section of the Academy of Sciences. In company with Professor William L. Watts, a mineralogist with the State Mining Bureau, Parsons embarked on a three-month prospecting tour over the planned railway routes, and was to scout the desert for the best possible routes for building roads.

Upon his return, Parsons respectfully reported on the "lack of transportation facilities" which retarded "development in sections that are rich in mineral wealth." Parsons emphasized the need for good roads to be built through the mining region, urging the San Bernardino County supervisors to construct highways and better water supplies for miners who traveled by foot with their burros. George modestly concluded the area

George W. Parsons as he appeared in his Tombstone days, 1886. (Courtesy the Arizona Historical Society)

was the "driest country [he] ever visited, but occasionally we found spots where there was water in abundance. In one small valley we found a spring that was gushing 260 inches of water."

Within a month George Parsons began his campaign for protection of the natural wells in the desert, the sinking of more water wells, and the building of better roads. Using the slogan "Good water and good roads," George's appeal was embraced by the Los Angeles newspapers. In the *Mining Review*, his motto was, "A good cry; one that comes ringing in off the Desert in full, sonorous tones, and which will, as is sincerely hoped, reach the ears of those who alone are empowered to deal with such a matter – the county supervisors."

Parsons soon focused more on the necessity for additional wells within the mining country and less on the need for roads, making this case his personal crusade. Using the press, Parsons dramatically recalled seeing "bleaching bones lie upon the desert" as an extreme reminder of how "man may possibly go as long as forty days without food [but] cannot go many hours without water." As George would later write about this experience:

Evidences of suffering and death from thirst on the desert were so tremendous, in one instance thirty skeletons reported discovered [in the desert along the Salt Lake City and Los Angeles Railroad tracks], *that upon my return from this trip I felt it was my duty as chairman of the mining committee… to see what could be done towards ameliorating the condition of man and beast on our great desert and lessen the annual death toll.*

As months became years George added to his campaign the need for sign posts to be installed in the desert to guide the traveler to drinkable water. Many of the "tenderfoot" miners did not know how to locate water in the desert. Claim-jumpers had removed the few hand-scrawled signs to discourage others from entering a "hot" mining area. Freighters who hauled Borax out of the mountains, found their water wells dry when it came to watering their mule-teams, and began to camouflage their wells.

The realization for the necessity of water-wells and signs posted to guide travelers toward water became a stark reality. Taking the initiative, San Bernardino County reported, "Springs will be developed wherever possible and the perils of prospecting on the desert reduced." Parsons continued his campaign for the development and preservation of the water-wells for another year. Then, in 1905, a bill was proposed by Lewis K. Aubury, State Mineralogist, to submit to the legislature for five thousand dollars to install "guide boards on the desert regions of Kern, San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino and Inyo counties of California and Nye and Esmeralda counties in Nevada."

George Parsons was not elated, however, the dollar amount proposed by Aubury did not please him; he felt it would not allow for the sinking of wells and the creation of signs necessary, adding that the money would be wasted. Politically savvy, Parsons reminded taxpayers that upkeep for the wells and

signs would be in the hands of the counties in which they would be located. He hoped the citizens would balk at the dollar amount requested and put pressure on the legislature to provide additional funds for the project. Regardless, the Bill was passed by the California legislature on March 22, 1905, and management of the appropriated funds was given to the State Department of Highways, which would choose how it was distributed.

Months passed and the sinking of fresh water wells and installation of guideposts in the desert had not occurred. By mid-summer nine more bodies had been found, and two delirious and naked men were found wandering the desert. Once they recovered, these men reported finding the skeleton of a man who had disappeared a year before, making the body count ten.

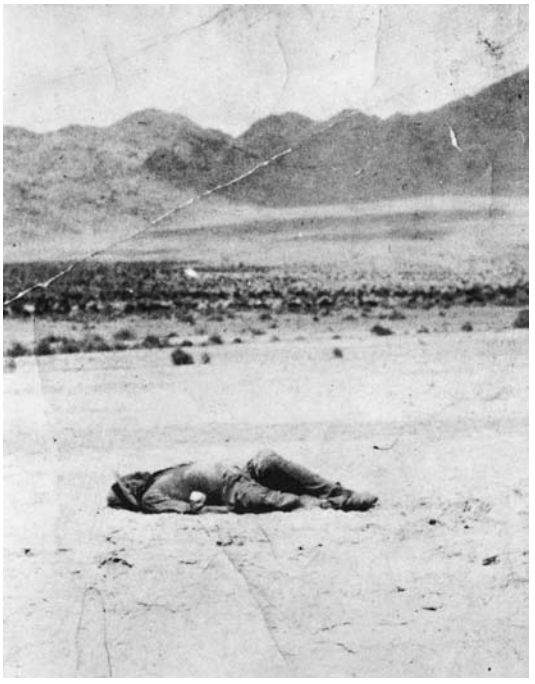
Examining the project assigned to the Department of Highways, it was discovered no signs or wells had been sunk by either the State or any of the counties, however, private institutions, capitalizing on the opportunity, had sunk new wells; water could be obtained by the miners—as long as they could afford the cost. An infuriated Parsons addressed the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce demanding it take action,

There is no longer the excuse that there is no authority given the county. For a man to be allowed to perish from thirst when within a few rods of a spring, all for lack of a sign to guide him to it is simply disgraceful, especially now that the law provides a means of supplying the signs.

By now the prospectors relied on each other for sign placement. Crude signs erected by the miners dotted the desert. Miner "monuments," rocks piled on top of each other, directed travelers to water, and signs warning where water was poisoned due to the drowning of animals, or other pollutants, were sporadically posted. Yet for as many miners who helped each other, there were those who fiercely protected their claims. Many signs were removed and signs warning of poisoned water were switched with those which identified safe water. Some went so far as to shoot large water tanks full of holes, allowing the water to seep back in to the ground.

Stimulated by Parsons' speech, Los Angeles County took action and within a month Kern, Riverside, Inyo and San Bernardino counties began placing signs in their deserts and took steps to keep the wells from being polluted. However, upon investigation it was discovered only one thousand dollars remained in the funds; during the building of the Nye county courthouse in Hawthorne, Nevada, four thousand dollars had been "lost somewhere in the shuffle."

To augment the loss of money, the desert counties set aside auxiliary funds and the Nevada legislature appropriated funds to make up for the mysterious "loss." Yet, by the end of 1905, the only attention given toward the signposts were the lengthy discussions between counties about which material the signs should be made of, and how to best create them. Five months later, in March 1906, Parsons pasted a newspaper article inside his scrapbook which noted the precise location of one hundred and thirty-eight signs planned for placement in the desert.



An unknown victim of Death Valley, 1904
(From Cronkhite, *Death Valley's Victims*)

Believing success had finally been achieved, George wrote, "Final result of my 4 years work for Prospector and Miner deserts."

In the following years, travel by automobile increased in the desert, increasing the need for water to provide not just for man and animal, but for radiators and an increase of travelers. Because of stolen or vandalized signs, numerous stories of stranded families were reported, as well as accusations that the signs intended for installation had never occurred. The state placed the blame on the counties, and vice-versa. By 1910 Parsons once again took action, only this time he pursued aid from the Federal government and began what would become a six year struggle to have Congress take responsibility for the safety of its citizens.

In 1915, the Automobile Club of Southern California began to erect their own signs in the desert, a service paid from the dues of its members. Although considered a positive step toward saving lives, the signs would only be placed along the roads traveled by motorists, not throughout the entire desert region, therefore, as Parsons argued, aid from the Federal government was still required.

As the years passed, the story of Parson's experiences in the desert became more dramatic. By 1916, the story of his 1903 surveyor trip for the Los Angeles Chamber's Roads Committee morphed into the story of a humble miner prospecting in the desert. By now George embraced the "desert rat" image and played up his experiences in Tombstone "chasing Apaches and dealing with stage robbers." Parsons realized if he portrayed himself as a victim of the desert, rather than a businessman sent to scout the territory, he would gain more credibility for the cause. As interest in his campaign increased in Congress, so did the number of men he found dead in the desert during his initial trip, which by now totaled thirty-six men.

The dramatic stories resulted in the action Parsons desired; on April 1, 1916, Congress approved a Bill presented by California Representative William D. Stephens the previous year. Although initially the Bill requested ten thousand dollars, the amount had been increased to twenty-five thousand dollars. This Bill also included a fine of one thousand dollars or imprisonment for not more than three years to be imposed upon any person who willfully or maliciously destroyed, defaced, removed any signpost installed by the government. Before the money could be distributed, however, Congress froze all funds in anticipation of entering the First World War

As evidenced by the many entries in his personal journal, Parsons worried over the outcome of these funds. His fears were relieved, though, when on February 20, 1917, a telegram informed Parsons that the House Appropriations Committee had agreed to the amended "Sundry Civil Bill," to allow for the originally requested amount of ten thousand dollars. .

In 1918, George published a pamphlet about his work on his "Desert Sign Post" initiative, *A Thousand-Mile Desert Trip and the Story of the Desert Sign Post* (Los Angeles: Times-Mirror, 1918). The reaction he received towards his contribution lends insight to the numerous people who wrote him letters of appreciation; Charles Lummis, Zane Grey, Walter Raymond, now-Governor William Stephens, and Charles Daggett. One letter in particular stands out among the rest:

> *No one can fully appreciate the value of your work as those who have hungered and been at thursted [sic] in desert wastes. Yet even their words are too feeble to measure the blessing that your thoughtful perseverance has wrought out for humankind.*

The letter was written by Eliza Donner Houghton, a survivor of the Donner Party, which had been delayed crossing the desert for want of water, resulting in their late arrival in the snow-packed Sierra Nevada.

George felt it was his Christian duty to ensure mankind was protected on earth, and as a descendent in a long line of successful men, George aspired to make a name for himself. It was the spirit of philanthropy without a hidden agenda, and George Parsons was indefatigable in his effort to ensure safe passage through the desert for all travelers.

(*Continued on page 19*)

As an avid collector of postcards of the Riverside County area, I came across some that show various scenes along the famous "Pines to Palms" Highway in the San Jacinto/Santa Rosa Mountains area. Most of them depict assorted desert vistas and such, but a few indicate they were taken from the Ribbonwood area. Finally I came across a couple that show Ribbonwood itself. Naturally, I became curious, and had to ask myself —

Where (and What the Heck) was Ribbonwood?

By Steve Lech

Of course, the first source I tried for information on this elusive place was my trusty copy of Jane Gunther's *Riverside County, California Place Names*. No luck. While Ms. Gunther didn't miss much, she did miss this one. So, I started making inquiries, and found a fascinating story.

Ribbonwood was the brainchild of Wilson Stout Howell Jr. If that name sounds somewhat familiar, it's because his father Wilson Howell was one of the top scientists working with Thomas Edison at his Menlo Park facility. The contributions of Howell Sr. were numerous, and he was able to amass no small amount of money in his later years.

Wilson Jr. was born in New Jersey on July 9, 1888, one of three children of Wilson Sr. and his wife Emma. As a boy, Wilson Jr. stood nearby to see some of the many experimental flights of the Wright brothers. This early fascination with airplanes led him to study mechanics and some engineering, and he spent the years during World War I as a designer and inspector in an aircraft factory. After the war, he decided to come west due to health reasons. In 1919, Howell came to Indio and began operating a ranch south of that town. The ranch he took over already had 2½ acres set out to Marsh seedless grapefruit, which did well in the Coachella Valley sun and with Howell's care. Howell soon started a mail-order business selling the fruit, which he picked only when ripe and shipped in quarter boxes. This became quite popular, and he had a large amount of trade for one person.

Howell slowly improved his land, leveling it by hand and planting other fruits such as figs, table grapes, and Deglet Noor dates. The dates apparently were the fruit he thought would ultimately do the best, since he indicated that the trees would eventually be the dominant crop on his ranch.

However, after nearly 10 years of work in Indio, he found that both the heat of the low desert and the long hours of work in it to make his ranch a success were taking a toll on his health. Although he liked the area, he began looking for a location that was out of the intense heat, but still in the same vicinity. He soon turned his attention to the Santa Rosa Mountains to the west and began looking for a place that was still within view of the desert, but would not be so hot. He found such a location, and soon began a most interesting, but overlooked, chapter in Riverside County's history.

The land that Howell found was situated at the base of Santa Rosa Mountain and the head of Palm Canyon. It was at the crossroads of several existing trails and was dotted with springs. Before the turn of the century, it had been an Indian rancheria known as *Gabelon*. Beginning in the 1890s, when cattlemen from the desert and the Cahuilla Valley area began driving cattle to market through there, it became known as Brush Corral. According to the late Clarence Contreras, a longtime mountain cattleman, it became a way-stop for cattle drives due to the abundance of water and for the corrals that were built around the springs. By the time Howell became interested in the property, it was just one more set of parcels that the Southern Pacific Railroad was trying to unload out of their land subsidy.

Howell fell in love with the area, and saw much potential in it. However, he had very little cash to make a purchase, so at first he tried to form a cooperative (they were later called communes) with some friends and neighbors. That idea quickly fell through, so Howell appealed to his father, who by now

was living in Escondido, for the money. Howell Sr. obliged, and Howell Jr. subsequently purchased three full sections of land (1,916.64 acres total – Sections 7, 17, and 21 of Township 7 South, Range 5 East) from the Southern Pacific railroad, which had been granted the land back in the 1870s when it built through the Coachella Valley.

When Wilson Howell purchased his property and moved onto it, his intention was to farm the land just as he had previously done in the desert. However, there were many challenges awaiting him. First of all, he noticed that during rainstorms, there were large torrents of water that would come off the hills carrying topsoil and rocks with them. Howell saw this as a waste, and decided to start damming the many small and large rivulets that dotted his land. He began what would become an obsession to keep the water that fell on his property on his property. He built check dams out of masonry, concrete, wood, brush, rock, and dirt across the many depressions on the property. These check dams would hold back water and eroded topsoil and keep it on the property. Then, one of two things would happen to the water. In most instances, it was allowed to percolate back into the soil and remain underground until it could be pumped from one of the many springs that existed on site. In the larger culverts, however, he constructed a series of pipes that led to reservoirs that would act as catch basins for water that would be available for immediate use. These reservoirs doubled as swimming holes for children in the area. In 1954, *Westways Magazine* writer V. O. Luckock asked Howell just how many dams he had constructed throughout the years. Howell proudly told him that "I guess I've built at least 4,500 of them, all told.... About 1,500 of them are major dams, the rest just little ones." Howell's system worked well, and local residents remember that he always had an abundance of water, no matter what the season.

Once Howell worked out the details of how he was going to furnish his property with enough water, he turned to the issue of raising crops. The northwestern portion of his property was fairly flat, and he quickly started to experiment with various orchards. Over the years, he planted orchards of apples, peaches, pears and other fruits, and had a large garden where he was able to grow most of the food he needed. Wilson Howell was described as an organic farmer long before the term had come into vogue. After leveling an area for planting, he would "feed" the soil by layering leaves, brush trimmings, and manure on it and leaving it to decompose. He continued this practice throughout the years, and was able to boast of some of the biggest and best produce anywhere. Long-time area resident Harry Quinn remembers riding with Howell in his old truck (that you had to spread your feet in the passenger seat and watch the highway go by) to pick up fallen oak leaves from various places around the area for his compost heaps. "Feeding" the soil in this way helped in two ways - it added organic materials to what is generally considered a rather sandy, mineral-rich soil, and it helped to retain the precious water that Howell delivered via his intricate network.

Once Howell began to improve his land, which in turn allowed him to improve himself now that he was out of the strong desert heat, Howell set out to improve his property and make his own "Garden of Eden" one that many others could enjoy too. He believed that the area would make an ideal getaway place for people wanting to relax in a better climate. There was one small problem though – access.

An interesting legend sprang up regarding Howell and access to his property. Howell had a Model T Ford that he drove from Ribbonwood through Pinyon Flats and along Deep Canyon. He then stashed it when he could travel no farther, and hiked down into the valley and eventually the 15 miles to Indio. Later, he purchased another Model T to shuttle him between Indio and the side of the mountain. The legend soon grew that Howell had "discovered" a road up to the mountains, when in fact he was using two cars and stashing them when he had to get out and hike!

Although his property was located on old trails, there was no good road leading to the place, and the closest true road ended at the Idyllwild Junction/Keen Camp area (now

Mountain Center) 12 miles to the north. To alleviate this problem, Howell joined the growing campaign led by *Indio Date Palm* editor J. Winn Wilson to have a new access road built between Idyllwild and the Coachella Valley. This campaign resulted in the construction of the much-advertised Pines to Palms Highway, which was opened in June 1932.

This new access road stretched from Idyllwild southeast through Wilson Howell's property, through Pinyon Flats, along Deep Canyon, and eventually connected to the Coachella Valley on the Indio Highway (today's Highway 111) at a point that in later years would become Palm Desert.

The official name for this highway, selected by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors in 1930, is the "Pines to Palms" Highway, not Palms to Pines. In later years, the name has been switched around.

With the opening of this new highway came Howell's most notable effort. Taking his cue from the many people who for centuries had settled along old roads and trails and set up a roadside rest stand, Wilson Howell cleared an area abutting the highway and constructed a brush ramada that became a store. He named his place Ribbonwood after the predominant vegetation cover there (Adenostoma sparsifolium – more commonly called Redshank). At his brush store, Howell sold produce from his farm, postcards, drinks, and handicrafts that he had fashioned out of the ribbonwood, chamise, and many other woody materials he had cleared from his property.

After completion of the store, Howell built a few more brush ramadas that served as covered picnic areas for people passing through. In two of these ramadas, he constructed rock fireplaces with chimneys so that picnickers could avail themselves of a fire for heat or a barbeque. However, Howell was not content in maintaining just the store and the picnic area. Because the move to the mountains had cured his ill health, he believed that others would come too. So, beyond the Ribbonwood highway turnout, he built picnic areas throughout his property, and cleared some 10 miles worth of roads and trails so that visitors could enjoy them. According to most accounts, Howell cleared the roads by hand, first clearing the brush then leveling the underlying ground with his shovel and wheelbarrow.

In order to further his ability to welcome people to his "Garden of Eden," Howell conceived of the idea of building cabins that he could rent out. Apparently, though, Howell was not much of a builder, because on November 1, 1935, he entered into an agreement

with an H. R. Van Horn of Loma Linda to build "neat rustic cabins" at Ribbonwood. Van Horn was to receive 85¢ for each night a cabin was rented, with the option that Howell could purchase the cabins after five years. Van Horn built approximately six to eight cabins, which became quite popular. With these and the many other improvements, Ribbonwood became a well-known way-station on the Pines to Palms Highway.

In order to boost the number of visitors to his Ribbonwood "resort," Howell approached owners of some of the well-known hotels in Palm Springs. Because many of the visitors were sometimes eager to see different scenery, or escape some of the warmer days, excursions began to be run from Palm Springs to Ribbonwood. On March 24, 1935, the *Los Angeles Times* indicated that guests of the El Mirador Hotel in Palm Springs had spent mid-day at Ribbonwood with a picnic lunch and a tour along the Pines to Palms Highway. Similarly, the famed Desert Inn maintained an outdoor grill area at Ribbonwood, to which they would take guests for similar outtings.

In 1944, Mabel Wilton, a free-lance writer for *Desert Magazine*, visited Ribbonwood and asked Howell about his plans. It apparently pleased him that someone was interested, and he indicated that:

I am trying to make this place into a sort of community rest center, or in other words a rest resort for people in ill health. I want to make it into a place that is entirely different from the general run of health resorts. A quiet, peaceful place with all the comforts of home, yet retaining as much of the natural scenery and atmosphere as possible. Something entirely rustic from beginning to end where sick people can come for the rest and relaxation they so badly need. I would prefer to make it into a place where artists, writers, scholars and scientists, who are badly in need of just such an environment, can come and forget their work for a brief spell, yet at the same time they can be surrounded by a beautiful natural setting. Instead of just the two cabins I have here now, I have visions of a group of log cabins up here on the top of this mountain, with lots of roads and trails leading to the most scenic spots. There could be a tennis court and a swimming pool, horseback riding, hiking and all kinds of sports. There are all sorts of hideaway places here among these rocks and it's an ideal place to come to get away from the hubub of city life.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Howell continued to farm, cater to tourists and travelers at Ribbonwood, and enjoy his holdings in the Santa Rosa Mountains. The year 1940 saw a major fire sweep through the area, taking Howell's house and the main ramada at Ribbonwood. But he rebuilt, and continued his efforts. Although he suffered a major heart attack around 1950, which left him unable to do heavy work, Howell continued to maintain his site and provide produce to Idyllwild and some of the resorts that were springing up in the desert.

By the early 1960s, Howell had decided to move on. He was in his early 70s, and the upkeep on his massive project was getting to be too much for the one man. He placed the property on the market, and in February 1964, found a buyer in William and Gloria Newell. The Newells were both interested in real estate and development, although they had come from differing careers – he had been a miner and aircraft part manufacturer, and she a singer with such bands as Tommy Dorsey's and Joe Venuti's. The Newells purchased all 1,916 acres of Howell's property, and began a massive development scheme called Spring Crest, which is the name by which Ribbonwood is known today. Spring Crest was touted as the newest city in the desert. It was going to be a haven for winter recreation and was going to offer homesites on one-acre lots. Planned within Spring Crest was a ski lodge (it was said that there would be at least 100 days per year of snow!), riding and hiking trails, picnic areas, and a golf course. In addition, the various streams would be dammed and the resulting reservoirs stocked with trout for fishermen.

Needless to say, in looking at Spring Crest today, none of the proposed amenities took shape. While several of the 1,916 acres were divided into one-acre parcels, and roads were built, Spring Crest today can boast of only a few houses and none of the sporting

centers originally proposed by the Newells. The only non-residential improvements that can be readily identified today include an abandoned gas station along Highway 74 (which was supposed to be a gas station, market, and restaurant), and a water tank belonging to the Spring Crest Water and Power Company. Nothing remains of Howell's brush structures or his cabins, which isn't surprising. However, a quick reconnaissance around the old Ribbonwood area showed that his main reservoir is still recognizable, as are a number of the check dams, especially those on the north side of Highway 74. Those that remain have long since silted over, and resemble steps more than actual dams.

Wilson Howell and the development of Ribbonwood remind us of the days when rugged individualists could and would purchase property for themselves and make it into a unique place that had a story of its own. Like Harry Oliver in 1000 Palms, or "Desert" Steve Ragsdale in Desert Center, Wilson Howell Jr. became a fixture for many years along a road that was advertised far and wide. Although he is probably one of the least remembered of those Riverside County characters, Howell's touch definitely added a unique story, long untold, in the history of our area.

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A DEATH IN THE DESERT

A side chapter to the story of Wilson Howell and Ribbonwood is that of Louise Teagarden. Louise Teagarden was a nurse who lived in the Coachella Valley. Apparently, she was a bit of a loner, and was the black sheep of her family. Family members expected her to take care of their ailing mother because she was a nurse. Over the course of several years, when she'd had all she could take, she would pack up her backpack and hike up to Ribbonwood, where she would stay either in the open or in a small ante room in Howell's cabin that was originally designed to be a firewood storage room. For several days or sometimes weeks, Teagarden would hike around the area, enjoying the solitude, and mapping every little spring, seep, or other source of water in the area, keeping the information on folded USGS quadrangle sheets. Louise used Ribbonwood as her "get-away" place at least from the mid-1940s and throughout the 1950s. However, in December 1959, Louise left Ribbonwood in a car, bound for Hemet to do some shopping – and never returned. Weeks later, her car was found abandoned, with the radiator cap on the seat (Howell had instructed her that if she was going to leave a car for a while, and there was a danger of freezing, to drain the radiator and put the cap on the seat as a reminder). She never returned to either her home or Ribbonwood, and for over 30 years her disappearance remained a mystery. It was not until 1991 that a hiker found the remains of Louise Teagarden far up in Palm Canyon. Apparently she had stopped to hike, fell, and died where she enjoyed spending time – in the San Jacinto/Santa Rosa Mountains area.

The Rebirth of *Tumbleweeds*

by Abraham Hoffman

Late in 1938 several people met in a darkened room in New York City to watch a motion picture few filmgoers had seen in the preceding thirteen years. The film was *Tumbleweeds*, the last screen effort of William S. Hart, superstar of the silent film era. At the apex of his career Hart had earned more than a million dollars a year playing the "good-bad" Western hero, his trademark Stetson hat and two guns known the world over.

Tumbleweeds, made in 1925, had been his most ambitious picture, made at a cost of $200,000. As an independent producer Hart had contracted with United Artists (UA) to distribute *Tumbleweeds*, but the studio bungled its theatrical release of the film. Hart lost $50,000 and the ability to produce his own films independently. Faced with the prospect of becoming just another studio employee, Hart chose instead to retire to his ranch in Newhall, California, effectively ending his film career.

Claiming UA had deliberately mismanaged the distribution of *Tumblweeds* for its own financial gain, Hart sued the studio and its then chief executive, Joseph Schenck. Now, after more than a dozen years, and numerous courtroom skirmishes, a Hart victory seemed imminent. UA was running out of reasons to appeal the adverse judgments against the studio.

The private screening of *Tumbleweeds* in 1938 had an odd connection to the lawsuit. The movie had not achieved the notice Hart believed it merited in the silent film era. There was a chance, however, that *Tumbleweeds* might be reincarnated as a sound film. Attentively watching the flickering images on the screen was Creighton J. Tevlin, vice president and treasurer of Astor Productions, Inc., a New York-based company specializing in reviving theatrical films for independent theater circuits. An unabashed Hart fan, the forty-year-old Tevlin shared an interest in *Tumbleweeds* beyond Hart's quest for courtroom justice.

Tevlin was considering the feasibility of adapting silent films to the sound era. An enormous reservoir of great silent films might be tapped for re-release if they were updated with sound effects and musical scoring. A decade earlier, the advent of sound had rendered silent films extinct as a viable form of motion picture production. But sound technology in the 1930s had progressed to the point where sound effects and music could be added to silent films at relatively small expense.

In testing the possible commercial value of sound-enhanced silent films, Tevlin quickly realized that most silent movies no longer stood the test of time. Actors in silent films had employed exaggerated facial expressions and body language to compensate for the lack of voice. Such action now seemed overwrought and unrealistic. When *The Eagle* was released in a sound-enhanced version, Tevlin noted how audiences laughed in the wrong places and at Rudolph Valentino's emotive acting style. Silent films picked for sound enhancement would have to be selected with modern "talkie" oriented audience tastes in mind.

Unlike most actors in the silent era, William S. Hart had portrayed a stoic, taciturn hero. Many of his film plots centered on an outlaw or amoral character reformed through the love of a good woman. His steely-eyed portrayals possessed a timeless quality that might translate into a sound-enhanced version of his films. Contacting Hart during one of the actor's New York visits, Tevlin arranged a meeting where he could see a print of *Tumbleweeds*. Hart asked Jesse Henley, a member of the law firm of House, Grossman, Vorhaus, and Henley, to arrange a viewing of *Tumbleweeds* with Tevlin and his partner, Robert Savini. So it was that Tevlin, Savini, Henley, Henley's son, and several technical people from Astor Productions saw William S. Hart ride once again across the silver screen.

Although Don Carver, Hart's character in *Tumbleweeds*, was not an outlaw, he preferred a home on the range to a home on the ranch — until the right woman came along. *Tumbleweeds* offered heroes and villains, humorous moments, and an outstanding action sequence based on the 1889 Oklahoma land rush. King Baggot, the film's director, did a creditable job of putting the historical episode on the screen. The screenplay was based on a story by popular Western writer Hal G. Evarts. In short, the visual images and the strong story line suggested that the film could stand the test of time.

Tevlin saw definite possibilities in updating what he believed was a neglected masterpiece. Believing the film could enjoy a successful commercial release in a sound version, Tevlin proposed a 50-50 deal to Hart. The actor would provide the master negative, and Astor Productions would add the sound effects and musical score. In addition, the Astor Company would distribute the film. Tevlin initially estimated the cost of adding sound to the film at $5,000. In proposing the reissuing of *Tumbleweeds*, Tevlin also suggested that Hart appear in a brief foreword to the film, giving Hart's old fans the opportunity to hear as well as see their favorite Western hero.

Before any agreement could be reached on Tevlin's proposal, however, an obstacle had to be removed. Hart had promised the Museum of Modern Art that he would donate nineteen films in his possession to the MOMA film library. Tevlin cautioned Hart against making this donation. If updating *Tumbleweeds* proved profitable, Hart might want to do the same with some of his other films, most notably *Hell's Hinges*. Once MOMA obtained the negatives from Hart, he might not be able to get them back for reediting, retitling, or sound track addition.

Hart consulted his New York attorneys on what rights he would retain from his donation to MOMA. Frederick Henley, a senior partner in the firm, counseled Hart to hold off on signing any agreement with MOMA until the matter of Hart's right to regan his negatives was clarified. Meanwhile, Tevlin kept up a steady correspondence with Hart through the month of January. He asked Hart to send him the *Tumbleweeds* negative, saying he had already lined up someone to do the musical score, and was contacting people at Republic Studio to supervise the sound foreword. Tevlin had also located the still photographs from *Tumbleweeds* at the Stern Photo Company, conveniently right there in New York. If Hart would provide written consent, Tevlin could obtain the pictures and use them in the advertising materials Astor Productions would prepare.

Hart weighed the consideration of an outright donation to MOMA against Tevlin's energetic campaign to revive *Tumbleweeds*. He had always believed his last film never had a fair chance in the marketplace, its distribution to major theaters blocked by the manipulations of Joseph Schenck, at the time head of United Artists. Hart claimed that Schenck had approved the illegal practice of "block booking" in distributing *Tumbleweeds*, forcing exhibitors to accept a package deal that included an unimportant film. Winning the lawsuit against UA would vindicate the film; and the opportunity to show it again to the public was too tempting to pass up. Reaching a decision, Hart contacted John E. Abbott, director of the MOMA film library, postponing the donation until he was certain his films no longer had commercial value.

Having cast his lot with Tevlin, Hart made sure there would be no confusion about how the reissue would be done. He left the laboratory work of editing and scoring to Astor Productions, but he informed Tevlin he would write the foreword himself. Moreover, he chided Tevlin on several occasions for calling the foreword a "prologue." Hart considered his contribution an introduction or foreword, but definitely not a prologue. The term implied that the original

Tumbleweeds was somehow incomplete. Hart wanted *Tumbleweeds* remembered in its own right. His foreword would sketch the historical setting in which *Tumbleweeds* took place, but was not to be considered any part of the actual film.

Tevlin lost no time in getting to work on updating *Tumbleweeds*. By mid-February 1939 he reported to Hart on Astor Productions' progress in preparing an advertising campaign, the readying of new titles, and composition of a new musical score. Tevlin urged secrecy on the project lest any competitors release older Hart pictures, such as the ones the actor had made for Triangle Productions which still had the negatives. The positive reception given the new films *Oklahoma Kid* and *Stagecoach*, noted Tevlin, signaled an interest in Westerns that would help make *Tumbleweeds* marketable as a summer release.

Hart busied himself drafting the foreword for the film. He sent a copy to Tevlin who found it usable without revision. Tevlin arranged for William Berke, a director for Republic Studio, to shoot the foreword at Hart's Horseshoe Ranch in Newhall. They set the date for Saturday, March 4, around noon.

The shooting of the foreword proceeded without any difficulties. Berke kept it simple: no long shots, no complicated camera angles. Hart, wearing cowboy garb, walked up to a selected spot and began speaking. A gentle breeze ruffled his bandanna as he stood there, reciting his speech in a voice polished from the quarter-century of stage acting that had preceded his movie career. Berke and Hart did the foreword in just two takes.

Hart's eight-minute foreword divided neatly into two parts. In the first part Hart provided historical background for the film, describing the Oklahoma land rush of 1889. He told of the "sooners" who attempted to sneak into the unassigned lands ahead of schedule, and the stampede made for land claims as settlers rode on horses, buckboards, bicycles, and various improvised vehicles in their rush to stake out their land.

Having spoken of the history behind the film, Hart removed his hat and directly addressed the camera in a personal tone. "My friends, I love the art of making motion pictures," he said. "It is as the breath of life to me." Hart did not mention the lawsuit against UA, nor did he acknowledge criticism that his brand of Western had gone out of fashion, replaced in the 1920s by the more flamboyant style of Tom Mix, or the recent popularity of Gene Autry as a singing cowboy. Instead, he spoke of broken bones and old age, combining unabashed sentimentality with nostalgia for a life in the authentic cinematic West.

Hindsight viewing of the foreword reveals that Hart had scripted more than an introduction to his final film; the foreword was also an epitaph. Hart recalled the joys of film-making, "the rush of the wind that cuts your face, the pounding hooves of the pursuing posse. And then — the clouds of dust! Through which comes the faint voice of the director, 'OK, Bill, OK! Glad you made it! Great Stuff, Bill, great stuff! And, say, Bill! Give old Fritz a pat on the nose for me, willya?'"

Hart paused in his monologue and, with trembling voice and clenched fists, brought it all back on the projector of his memory: "Oh, the thrill of it all!"

The actor concluded with a metaphorical description of a heavenly herd of cattle and a riderless Pinto pony — his famous horse Fritz had died a year earlier — and the invitation to join that last roundup. The whinny of the pony seemed to plead, "'Say, Boss! Whatcha ridin' with the drag fer? Why dontcha come on here, an' ride point with me? Can'tcha see, Boss, can'tcha see? The saddle is — empty? The boys up ahead are calling, they're waiting for you and me to help drive this last great roundup into — eternity.'"

And finally: "Adios, amigos. God bless you all, each and every one."

Berke sent the film immediately to New York. Tevlin screened the foreword and informed Hart, with some degree of showman's exaggeration, that the actor's voice was "the clearest and finest I have ever heard recorded." He hoped for a story in *Life* or *Look* on the reissue of *Tumbleweeds*, possibly tying in the UA lawsuit.

With the foreword awaiting editing and the press book also in preparation, Tevlin believed it time to initiate publicity about the impending re-release of the film. A short notice about *Tumbleweeds* appeared in the *New York Times* on April 1, announcing that "Astor Pictures Corporation will reissue William S. Hart's famous Western, 'Tumbleweeds.' The voice of the cowboy star of the silent era will be heard on the screen for the first time in an eight-minute foreword which has been tacked on to the original drama dealing with the opening of the Cherokee land strip." The notice also mentioned that sound effects and a new musical score were being added to the film. Tevlin also placed ads in the trade papers on April 18, reporting to Hart, "Let the Schenck boys laugh this one off."

Meanwhile, the hard work of obtaining distribution contracts lay ahead, and the *New York Times* announcement of a May 1 release quickly proved premature. As Astor Productions negotiated with film exchanges for the showing of *Tumbleweeds*, sneak previews brought favorable reviews from *Film Daily*, *Motion Picture Herald*, and *Showmen's Trade Review*.

Tevlin obtained an opening date of May 26 at the Strand Theatre in Washington, D.C., but by early June only a disappointingly small number of theaters had accepted the film. Tevlin notified Hart that exhibitors wanted to screen the picture before committing themselves. "This is natural, because they know this picture is fifteen years old," said Tevlin. But even though exhibitors liked it, they still wanted "test runs" before contracting to run the picture in their theater chains. This seemed unnaturally cautious for independent exhibitors. Hart believed there were no truly independent theaters and that ultimately the major producers and theater syndicates controlled distribution.

As crucial weeks slipped by, Tevlin became concerned over the small number of bookings. Many exhibitors offered to take the film at a flat rental rate, some as low as fifteen or twenty-five dollars for a week's run. Tevlin preferred taking a percentage of the receipts, 20 or 25%. Percentage offered more profit than rental, but the dickering caused distribution to move slowly.

Whether *Tumbleweeds* could stand the transition to the sound era remained a question whose answer could affect its success. Were a musical score, updated titles, and added sound effects enough to carry a film competing in 1939 with such outdoor epics as *Gunga Din* and *Stagecoach*? Reviewers in Cleveland, Ohio, didn't think so. Labeling the film "a laughable novelty," one Cleveland critic observed, "'Tumbleweeds' isn't for the younger generation. It's for those of us who will ignore Mr. Hart's obvious sincerity in refurbishing it and offering it up as a serious subject and will go to see it just for the laughs." Tevlin called such reviews "ill-spirited," and pointed out to Hart that in other cities where bookings had been made the film was doing very well. It even made money in Cleveland despite the negative reviews.

Los Angeles was a key city where Tevlin hoped for use of the prestigious Pantages Theatre in Hollywood. The best the local agent could do, however, was a four-day run at the Marcal, a second-run house. To create maximum publicity for the event, Tevlin and the manager of the Marcal invited Hart to make a personal appearance at the theater, or perhaps a cocktail party at the Brown Derby, or a press conference and interview. Hart turned down all such requests. "I have definitely & positively retired from the stage and screen," he said. "Regarding meeting any members of the press — I have known many of the ladies & gentlemen for years, & I believe it would be bad form on my part to

join them when they are sitting in judgment on my picture, & I believe that they would feel exactly the same way I feel about it."

Hart agreed to wear cowboy garb and come to the theater, but he would remain backstage. He kept his word, though there must have been some ambivalence in his decision. Hart attended the premiere performance on September 25, but he gave no interviews and did nothing to call attention to his presence in the theater.

By mid-September the first receipts had come in, and the returns were not especially encouraging. Some $4,500 in contracted business had been done, as contrasted with the $11,269.59 in expenses that included lab costs, editing, and advertising. This figure rose with subsequent statements. By December the receipts were up to $7,000, but by that time new bookings were very few in number.

In the fall of 1939 United Artists was down to its last court appeals, fighting a last-ditch stand against Hart's tenacious attorneys in the long-running lawsuit. The last appeal was turned down in May 1940, and Hart collected $278,210 and a vindication of the work he had done in his final film. During this period Creighton Tevlin caught a broad hint of Joseph Schenck's resentment and how recalcitrant UA could be in settling the long-standing dispute. Tevlin described to Hart an "amazing incident" that occurred in November 1939. He had arranged a tentative movie deal with Harry Brandt whose Brandt circuit controlled about ninety theaters in greater New York, for the booking of *Tumbleweeds*, including a run at the Central Theatre. "As far as we were concerned the date was all set at one time," reported Tevlin, "and the theatre manager had even ordered and purchased advertising material such as still photos, lithographs, etc." Then one delay mysteriously followed another: one of Brandt's brothers objected to showing the film, Harry Brandt was out of town and could not approve the booking date, phone calls were not returned. "After many weeks it was apparent that they had no intention of playing the picture," said Tevlin.

What had caused the Brandt circuit to change its mind about *Tumbleweeds*? Tevlin met a former Brandt employee who supplied a possible answer. This employee was in Brandt's office when Brandt took a call from Joseph Schenck or Joseph's brother Nicholas. The employee told Tevlin that Brandt said flatly he had given his word "over the phone to Schenck that I will not play that picture."

Tevlin regretted that he had no hard evidence to offer against Joseph Schenck, but the story strongly suggested Schenck was actively attempting to interfere with the distribution of the sound version of *Tumbleweeds*. Similar experiences had occurred with other exhibitors. Tevlin speculated on the possibility Schenck had acted out of fear that one or more of the five appellate judges in the UA lawsuit case might see the new version of *Tumbleweeds* — the case was being tried in the New York courts — and that such viewing might influence the judge. "These people are not going to keep us off the screen," Tevlin declared. "They might succeed in making our venture unprofitable, but I am glad to say that we do find a great number of independent exhibitors, who either have not been reached, or who are not listening to advice that might be given to them."

The reissue of *Tumbleweeds* briefly focused renewed attention on the old silent film actor. Hart had turned down all offers to return to movies, but radio seemed a possible avenue to revive his career. An agent sent Hart a sample script that suspiciously resembled Gene Autry's popular radio format — a Western dude ranch setting, comedy, and music, with Hart serving as host and master of ceremonies. Hart turned it down, saying he preferred "complete stories in one act, dramatically correct in continuity and interest" — perhaps anticipating the radio version of *Gunsmoke* a decade later.

Although *Tumbleweeds* lost money again — the film had grossed $9,229 by September 1940 — its reappearance prompted an offer to buy the rights to remake it. Tevlin set a price of $50,000 for the option, knowing the amount would be unacceptable, but affirming his belief that "perhaps 50 years from now it can claim its reward as one of the milestones of the silent era." Whatever

Tevlin's accuracy in predicting the future status of *Tumbleweeds* in cinema history, the fact remained that the film had pretty well run its commercial course. "We are trying every manner of exploitation to procure bookings," Tevlin wrote Hart on September 12, 1940, "but to no immediate avail."

The final chapters in the *Tumbleweeds* story took place in Newhall, California. Long despairing that his adopted town lacked a real movie theater, Hart determined to provide one. He owned three lots at the corner of Eleventh and Spruce Streets, a good location for a movie theater. But Hart had no intention of making any personal profit from such a venture. Instead, he deeded the lots to the Newhall-Saugus Post of the American Legion, put up $15,725 for the construction of the theater, and commissioned theater architect S. Charles Lee to design a building that would contain 400 seats as well as a headquarters for the Legion Post. The design also included a stage so that the American Theatre, as it would be called, could be utilized for theatrical performances. News of Hart's generosity was made public on November 8, 1940, with construction to be completed by the spring of 1941.

While the American Theatre was being built, the Los Angeles agent for Astor Productions booked *Tumbleweeds* into Newhall's Masonic Hall. The showing was scheduled for January 11-12, 1941, but Hart was stunned when at the last minute *Tumbleweeds* was pulled, replaced by *Scarface*. An angry Hart demanded to know why the switch had been made. The agent apologized, explaining that the exhibitor had violated his contact and had since disappeared. Regrets aside, the sound version of *Tumbleweeds* did not play at Newhall until May 22, 1942 — at the American Theatre. The manager announced a free matinee for children, and Hart appeared briefly at the evening performance.

With the curtain coming down on *Tumbleweeds*, the actors involved in the film's rebirth pursued other paths. Creighton J. Tevlin moved to Los Angeles in 1942 and went on to a successful career as a producer for Paramount, RKO, and other studios. At the time of his death in 1966 he was working for Superscope as a senior administrative executive.

Hart's nemesis in the distribution of *Tumbleweeds*, Joseph M. Schenck, ran into other problems in the 1930s. Even as he fought Hart's lawsuit, Schenck found himself embroiled in charges of federal income tax evasion, labor racketeering, and perjury. Around the same time that Hart won the final arguments in his lawsuit, Schenck entered the U.S. Correction Institute at Danbury, Connecticut, convicted of perjury. He served four months and five days, and paid a fine of $20,000. Down but not out, Schenck received a pardon from President Harry Truman in 1945 and resumed his role as a movie mogul, heading at various times 20th Century-Fox and United Artists. When Schenck died in 1961 at age 82, some 400 mourners, mainly from the film industry, attended his funeral.

William S. Hart died in 1946 at the age of 81 — six years older than most of the reference books have listed him. Before his death Hart deeded one of his properties as a park for the City of Los Angeles, and his Horseshoe Ranch was given to Los Angeles County to be a county park. Hart gave *Tumbleweeds*, along with a number of other films under his control, to the Museum of Modern Art. For decades *Tumbleweeds* could only be seen at museum showings or specialized film festivals, but the video revolution since the 1980s has made it possible for Hart again to ride across the screen and for new generations to value his work.

FOR FURTHER READING

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Monthly Roundup . . .

July 2008

Is Southern California's Spanish-Colonial architecture simply an attempt to build "a sense of heritage" in the region, or does all that "stucco, red tile, and palm trees" hold a deeper meaning? Albert Fu argues that architecture has been used here to build walls of separation – both figurative and literal – between different members of our society.

Fu, a doctoral candidate at the State University of New York and a recent recipient of a research grant from our corral for study at the Autry National Center, described how authors, artists, architects, filmmakers, "and most of all city boosters" created an image of Southern California as a land of Spanish romance. Spanish-Colonial architecture was a part of that trend. First introduced in the late 19th century, the style became vastly popular in the 1920s.

How that style of architecture played out in both public and private places is the focus of Fu's recent research.

August 2008

French immigrants were few in number, but played a significant role in pioneer Los Angeles, according to Helen Demeestere, our speaker for August. Only nine Frenchmen are enumerated in 1836 census, 19 in 1850, and 235 in 1860. Yet among them were prominent

winemakers, ranchers, businessmen, politicians, and civic leaders.

Louis Vignes came in 1829. "As his name tells you, he was a vineyardist," Demeestere explained. He was the area's first large-scale commercial vintner. Miguel Leonis was an early Basque shepherd who later acquired his own cattle ranch at Calabasas. Though he had a rather unsavory reputation, his family remained prominent in the development of the area for decades. Solomon Lazard was one of a number of Alsatian Jews who became successful businessmen in 19th century Los Angeles.

Joseph Marchessault, a pioneer of 1844, served as Mayor Los Angles during the Civil War years, despite the fact that he never learned to speak English. Even one of the early priests at the Plaza Church was a Picpus father from France; the Rev. Juan Bachelot, who arrived in 1832.

During Mexican rule, many French immigrants had the advantage of being Catholic, and some already spoke Spanish. Then came the Gold Rush, and new opportunities. The years from the early 1850s to about 1880 were "really the golden years for the French," according to Demeestere.

Desert Signposts . . .

(*Continued from page 6*)

Perhaps George himself best summed up his work when he wrote:

Of the thirty six men mentioned…they are only a few of the long line of men who have met a fearful death from thirst, whose stories have never been told, and whose numbers will never be known.

September 2008

In "Sunset Riders: The Later Careers of Ken Maynard and William Boyd," longtime Corral member Abe Hoffman traced the very different paths that two old time cowboy stars followed in their later years.

Both men began their careers in the silent film days, Maynard mostly in Westerns, while Boyd worked through a variety of genres. Both were successful for a time, then faded. But where Boyd revived his career on the strength of Hopalong Cassidy, Maynard spiraled down to a sad end. "Alcoholism and an over-active ego ruined Maynard's career, Hoffman explained.

Boyd saw the value in Hopalong Cassidy, and eventually bought up all the rights to his character. After 66 Hopalong films over 14 years, he moved the stories over to radio and the new medium of television, re-establishing the character for a new generation of fans.

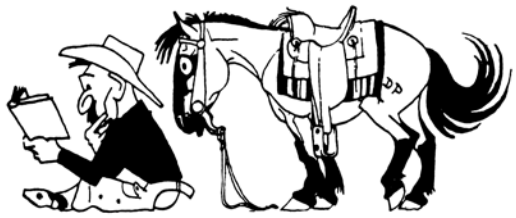
Boyd also licensed Hopalong's image for all sorts of items, including lunch boxes, comic books, watches, and even drinking straws. Fellow Westerner Gary Turner embellished Hoffman's presentation with a display of some of the many items from his personal collection.

THE RESCUE OF COWBOY JAKE

There was a young cowboy named Jake
Whose horse was spooked by a snake.
From his saddle he flew,
Through the sky pale blue,
Upon landing his leg he did break.
He lay on the ground,
His grin now a frown,
His future was left up to fate.
The weather turned cold,
And the coyotes grew bold,
The afternoon soon became late.
Fret bloomed into worry,
If help didn't hurry,
He'd never again see his Kate.
As he thought of his girl,
And the wind started to swirl,
He heard sounds a wagon would make.
To his relief,
And disbelief,
Came a vision that no one could fake.
It was that of his girl,
And his best friend Burl,
Atop a wagon and setting the brake.
His horse had come home,
By itself, all alone,
And worry his Kate could not take.
She and Burl both would back-trail,
They swore they would not fail,
It was a promise to find her lost mate.
The tracks they did follow,
'Til they looked down in a hollow,
And saw motion a body might make.
There poor Jake did lay,
And he was starting to pray,
That help would not come too late.
Now that is the story,
Without any glory,
Of the rescue of Cowboy Jake.

– Tim Heflin

Down the Western Book Trail . . .



VOYAGES OF DELUSION: The Quest for the Northwest Passage, by Glyn Williams. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. 496 pp. Illustrations, Maps, Appendices, Index. Cloth, $40. Order from Yale University Press, P.O. Box 209040, New Haven, CT 06520, or *www.yale.edu/yup/*

If the travel bug ever bites you, you can drive from Los Angeles north into Canada, take a detour off the Alcan Highway to the Dempster Highway, and go to the town of Inuvik, not far from the Arctic Ocean. This is the northernmost point a person can drive by automobile or RV in North America, though a route from Fairbanks to Barrow in Alaska may some time be feasible. We take it for granted today that road maps will be accurate, motels, restaurants, and gasoline stations will provide for our creature comforts, and that if a motor vehicle problem develops on the highway, we won't starve to death before help arrives.

Glyn Williams describes quite a different Arctic in his narrative of efforts to discover the Northwest Passage in the 18th century. He succeeds remarkably well in bringing to life the passions, hardships, wrongheaded speculations, and geographical understanding of the period. The first half of the book recounts the efforts to find a passage out of Hudson's Bay that would lead to the Pacific and the rich trading opportunities with Asia. In 1719 James Knight made an ill-fated attempt that left him and his crew stranded on remote Marble Island, their deaths not confirmed until decades later. Arthur Dobbs, a member of Parliament, began a campaign in 1731 to send ships that would succeed where Knight had failed. Dobbs resented what he saw as the Hudson's Bay Company's secretive policies in monopolizing the fur trade and its failure to explore the region instead of hunkering down at Churchill, York Fort, and other company outposts on the bay.

Dobbs' political pressure and influence succeeded in the sending of Christopher Middleton to Hudson's Bay in 1741. Their bitter subsequent rivalry stemmed from Middleton's on-site hardships with the realities of Arctic ice, inadequately equipped ships, scurvy, and inexperienced crews. Back in England, Dobbs theorized about the height of tides pointing to a strait leading out of the bay to the Pacific – a strait Dobbs felt Middleton should have found if he had been at all competent. Subsequent efforts only added to the problem of exploring Hudson's Bay. Armchair geographers propounded geographical theories, producing maps that filled in blank spots with speculations of little practical value but of great harm to any explorer who believed that such imaginary inlets, bays, or rivers actually led somewhere.

In the second half of the book Williams looks at exploration from the Pacific side, noting the explorations of Russia, Spain, France, England, and (eventually) the United States, to confirm the existence of the Strait of Anian. The major figure here is Captain James Cook, who explored much of the inland passage in an unsuccessful effort to find a strait that led east. Debate between theoretical and actual geography was not ended until George Vancouver made a painstaking and careful charting of the region from Puget Sound northward to confirm finally that any easy passage between the Atlantic and Pacific was a delusion.

The book is enhanced with reproductions of period maps that are somewhat difficult to read since they are reduced from the actual size of the originals, but still convey the fanciful ideas about the Arctic region's geography. Modern maps orient the reader, and numerous illustrations of people and places make this an attractive and interesting book.

– Abraham Hoffman