

This 1950 issue of Harry Oliver's *Desert Rat Scrap Book* features his fanciful sketch of Pegleg Smith on the cover. Author's collection.

## Black Gold, Three Buttes, and a One-Legged Man. The Legend of Pegleg Smith *By Phil Brigandi*

It's one of those curious things about human nature that some people seem to think it's easier to find gold that somebody else lost than to just go out and find their own. But that's part of the power of the legend of Pegleg Smith.

Like all good lost mine stories, there are endless versions of the Pegleg legend. About all they seem to agree upon is that Pegleg Smith found his curious black-coated gold nuggets near three small buttes somewhere

out on the desert. But Pegleg could never find the spot again – and people have been looking for it ever since.

I should make it clear right from the start that I have never found any compelling evidence to believe the Pegleg story. And thus I have no interest in trying to unravel the mystery. What interests me are the many ways the Pegleg legend has played out over the last 150 years.

*(Continued on page 3)*

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Editor's Corner

Phil Brigandi again regales us with an interesting "history," told almost as if we were all sitting around a campfire in the desert (well, maybe he did tell this in that setting,) of the mythology around the famed Pegleg Smith and his cache of gold. In his inimitable way, Phil addresses various versions of the Pegleg myth and concludes (quite rightly) that these tall tales form their own history. Whether anyone reads this takes it upon themselves to go searching for that "black gold" somewhere out in the desert is hard to say, but, if so, let them be warned!

Not so mythological, but certainly historical with our corral, is the indomitable Glen Dawson, who celebrated his 100th birthday in many ways in early June 2012. Corral member Elizabeth Pomeroy adroitly summarizes the several events held, including a large birthday bash at the City Club in Pasadena at which our own Gary Turner served as an emcee with distinction and many corral members attended. Sheriff Eric Nelson presented the official best wishes of the Los Angeles Corral, the text of which follows Pomeroy's summary. It should be noted that one of the principals in the time-intensive planning of the festivities was corral member Nick Curry, who devoted a great deal of time and energy on the recognition of this significant milestone.

Sheriff Nelson also provides a concise summary of our June Fandango, held at the Andrés Pico Adobe in Mission Hills, and was sure to thank the many corral members who helped. This included, most significantly, Richard Doyle, who, when the organization faced a late change of venue, stepped forward to help our Sheriff in getting the event moved to the Adobe.

Finally, Loren Wendt contributes another set of three cowboy poems for the issue, which, it is hoped, our members continue to enjoy!

—Paul Spitzzeri

Now Pegleg Smith was real enough. His real name was Thomas Long Smith, and he was born in Kentucky in 1801. In the hoary pages of Bancroft's "Pioneer Register" he is described as a "Kentuckian trapper and mountaineer, known as 'Peg-leg' Smith from his wooden leg. The chronology of his wild career is confusing; but he may have stolen horses in Cal. in '29 and several times later, as he was fond of boasting in late years.... In '41 'El Cojo Smit' was reported to be in com[mand] of a party of vagabonds from N. Mex. ... after '49 he lived in Cal., and died at S.F. in '66."

Elsewhere, one of Bancroft's minions notes that the claim that 'El Cojo' (the lame one) first came to California in 1829 is "a report that I have not been able to trace to any reliable source." Yet it was on that trip that he is usually credited with his incredible discovery.

From there, the stories take off in all directions. An 1892 newspaper story says he was later found "insane from thirst" by emigrants, with "several large nuggets of solid gold" in his pockets. He was also said to be a brother of Jedediah Smith; with a stump from a Palo Verde tree; a resident of San Bernardino; a ranch hand in El Monte; well-known in Yuma; and finally the victim of a saloon fight in a Los Angeles in 1880 – none of which is true. Horace Bell once called him "the greatest horse thief" in the West and a "superlative liar."

Someone once said Pegleg had more lives than a cat. And, in fact, in some versions of the tale, more than one one-legged man named Smith is introduced, perhaps in a futile attempt to reconcile all the many different accounts that stretch on into the 1870s, long after the real Pegleg's death in 1866.

In the 1850s, the real Pegleg Smith made a least one trip back to the desert to search for his lost lode. The Los Angeles Star (April 22, 1854) reports he went out "in the region of country on the Colorado near the mouth of the Virgin [River]." Artist S.N. Carvalho met him out on the Mojave Desert during that trip: "He is a weatherbeaten old chap, and tells some improbable tales," he noted in his journal.

Yet Pegleg's endless tales sent a host of others out into the wilderness to search for his "lost mine." Some even coined new words to describe the mania – they were pegleggers, out peglegging on the desert.

But which desert? At one time or another, most anywhere on the Colorado and Mojave Deserts on up to the Death Valley country and over into Nevada, or along the Colorado River on the Virgin, or down on the Bill Williams River in Arizona, has been pointed out as the likely spot for Pegleg's "sunburned" nuggets.

Philip Bailey (author of *Golden Mirages*, which traces many versions of the story), once asked an old peglegger named Charles Knowles why there were so many different stories about Pegleg Smith. "There are lots of reasons," he replied, "some of which are because some prospectors are damn liars."

Some of them also became famous. Riverside pioneer Tom Cover collected Pegleg stories for years, and in the 1880s made several trips to the desert looking for his lost mine. In 1884, he failed to return, and the long, unsuccessful search for his body brought fresh fame to the Pegleg legend.

The King of the Pegleggers, though, was probably H.E.W. Wilson, an English immigrant who searched for Pegleg's gold off and on for more than half a century, beginning in 1901. He never found it.

Wilson was one of many lost mine aficionados who wrote up the tale for the press. Pegleg's legend also inspired at least one play and a motion picture.

In 1887, an author signing himself only "W.A.S" published his script for "The Peg-Leg Claim: A Modern Comedy, in Four Acts" in the *Los Angeles Times*. It's a rather bland bit of business, mixing a search for gold with getting the girl (and he does find the gold).

In 1915, the Bison 101 Film Company filmed "Old Peg Leg's Will" out near Barstow. In the film, a "dying miner ... confides the secret of immensely valuable mining property to a girl who befriends him. Made fatherless by her parent's suicide, the girl finds the source of the recluse's wealth when all others have failed to do so." (*Riverside Daily Enterprise*, March 8, 1915).



A block print by Harry Oliver captures the scene at an early Pegleg Smith Liars Contest. (Nell Murbarger Collection, Costa Mesa Historical Society)

The story also caught the eye of another movie man – Harry Oliver (1888-1973), a studio art director, twice nominated for an Academy Award. In the 1920s, Oliver started a hobby ranch in the Borrego Valley, and soon became fascinated with the Pegleg legend. He eventually declared himself press agent for Pegleg Smith's ghost and set out to have fun with the old tale. One of his favorite stunts was to build fake, suitably aged wooden peg legs to stash near water holes on the desert. Then he'd sit back and wait for the inevitable news story when some found 'a new clue to Pegleg's black gold.' ("They stock trout streams, don't they?" he later pointed out.)

Oliver decided that the Pegleg story was a valuable asset and he set out to bring it once and for all to the Borrego Desert. "Over a period of years," he once admitted, "with the help of newspapers of the Southwest I have coaxed the old rascal into Borego[sic] Valley." He compared the Pegleg legend to Ramona, or William Tell, or Shakespeare's Juliet – all of whom had their monuments. (*Calico Print*, November 1951).

In 1946, Oliver launched his famed *Desert Rat Scrap Book*, and it is a rare issue that doesn't include at least once Pegleg squib. And thanks in part to Oliver's efforts, the official, bona fide, state historical land-

mark plaque commemorating Pegleg Smith (#750) was dedicated in 1960, within sight of Oliver's old Borrego ranch adobe.

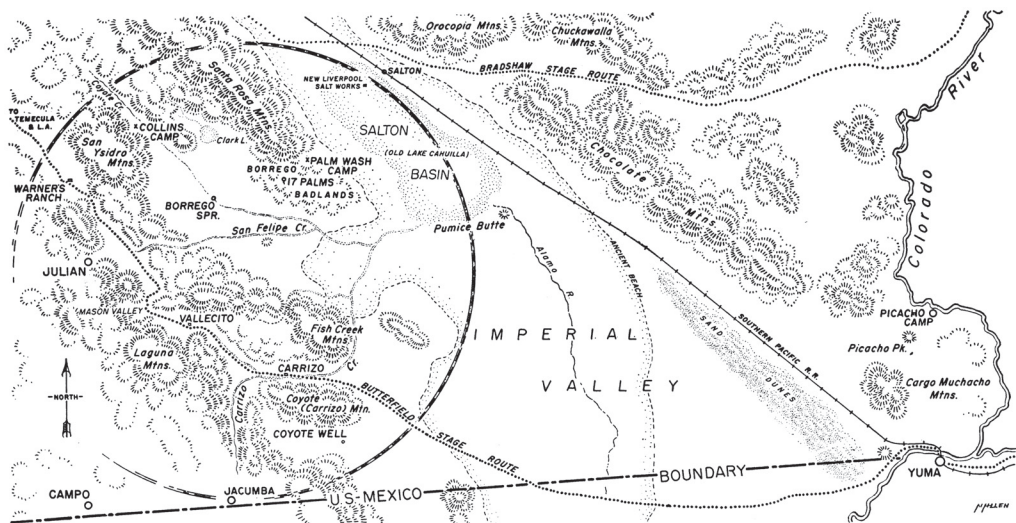
Oliver's other enduring contribution to the Pegleg legend is the Pegleg Smith Liar's Contest, still held each spring in the Borrego Valley at the foot of the state monument.

The contest actually began as a trek out into the desert, based in part on the annual Lost Dutchman trek in Arizona. Ray Heatherington, who ran the rock and book shop at Knott's Berry Farm, was another big booster (the two argued for years about who really started on the contest). The first Lost Pegleg Mine Trek was held on January 1, 1948. A year later, on New Year's Eve, a fire-side liar's contest was added, followed the next day by the second annual trek.

The trek continued until 1952, but was soon overshadowed by the liar's contest, which featured tall tales, music, and prizes for the winners in several categories. All the stories were expected to revolve around Pegleg Smith and his desert adventures. The contest continued until 1960 and was revived in 1975 by desert guidebook author Diana Lindsay (having moved to the first Saturday in April in search of better weather). It continues to this day.

The Pegleg legend had devolved to mostly fun and games until March of 1965





*The Colorado desert of Southern California as of 1900. The circle encloses approximately the area in which the author of this story has carried on his search for the lost Pegleg gold.*

Henry Wilson's search for the lost Pegleg gold centered around the Borrego Desert. This map accompanied his November 1946 article for *Desert Magazine*.

when an earth-shattering letter appeared in *Desert Magazine*. About ten years before, the writer claimed, he had been out "less than 30 miles from the Salton Sea," when he noticed a curious rock sitting on the desert sands. Picking it up, he noticed it felt heavy, so he scraped it with a knife. "When I saw the yellow glitter I dropped it – then picked it up again with a trembling hand. I'll never know how long I sat there paralyzed with that first black gold nugget in my hand.... The next thing I remember I was scrambling wildly on my knees among the pebbles, picking them up by the handfuls and hefting for heavy ones."

Over the years, he said, he had sold \$314,650 worth of his golden bounty, and now decided he could finally tell the tale, even offering to answer questions from the curious. And for proof, he enclosed a few gold nuggets; some cleansed of their "black copper oxides," others not.

He hedged about his find actually being Pegleg's lost gold, and made quite a point that there were no black buttes anywhere in sight, but he still signed himself "The man who found Pegleg's black gold"

Fascinated readers bombarded the magazine with letters – six of them were published in the very next issue; eight more the month after that. Some readers congratulated him.

Others pressed him for more information. And from the start, some questioned the details of his improbable tale. "Mr. Pegleg" (as the magazine staff dubbed him) responded to many of the letters, always enclosing another nugget or two to verify his identity.

From the start, some folks were convinced the whole thing was a fraud (perhaps to increase magazine sales). For one thing, the letters were awfully well written. Mystery writer and *Desert Magazine* contributor Erle Stanley Gardner suggested that Mr. Pegleg had "made more money selling manuscripts than you have selling nuggets!" Other people suggested that Gardner himself was the culprit – or Harry Oliver, or Horace Parker, or even Randall Henderson, the founder of *Desert Magazine*.

By the end of the year, Mr. Pegleg complained that many of the letters had become "repetitious or of the nit-picking variety... so you probably won't be hearing from me in the future unless something unusual comes up."

And, quite conveniently, something did. In June 1966, *Desert* published an article by Robert Buck that speculated that the Pegleg gold was actually the remains of an 18th century mule train shipment, dispatched by one Luis Peralta. Crossing the desert, he claimed, the men were attacked by Indians, and the



And here is the author, presenting one of his Pegleg tall tales at the 1995 Liars Contest. A five-time winner, he retired from the competition in 2005 and now serves as Master of Ceremonies. (Courtesy Judy Winter Meier, *The Borrego Sun*)

gold scattered.

Mr. Pegleg seemed quite amenable to this new theory. He wrote to say that he had wondered why all the gold was on, or near the surface, and in such a limited area. Oh, and did he mention he had found a “corroded [belt] buckle” amid the riches? But when he couldn’t find that relic, he went back to the site and found a rusted piece of “scabbard” which he sent to the magazine that fall. In the accompanying letter, he imagined how the wearer might have found himself “in the final agony of approaching death and staggered a few hundred yards before falling to his knees to pray for the end, his sword thrown behind, his empty scabbard flopping at his side to remain there a century and a half while all else dissipated under the pitiless sun until finally only a remnant of the scabbard marked the point of death?”

By 1968, *Desert Magazine* had gathered up the nine issues with Pegleg material and was selling them as a set for \$4. But by the end of the year, the letters had dried up, and it was not until 1974 that Mr. Pegleg appeared in its pages again. His last hurrah was in 1980, when he claimed his find had

netted him a total of more than \$2,000,000 over the years.

The entire episode seems to be a question of who was hoaxing whom. Choral Pepper (the editor who first published Mr. Pegleg’s story) went to her grave insisting that the letters were real. But unless you also accept the “lost Peralta gold” story, heavy gold nuggets sitting atop the alluvial plain simply isn’t possible.

Are there still people today who believe the Pegleg legend? Absolutely. Some even believe it strongly enough to still go out searching for his lost gold. Others are still gathering clues. Some of them have contacted me from time to time to pump me for information. I hardly know what to say.

In a way, it doesn’t even matter anymore if Pegleg actually found his black gold – or anyone else since. Given enough time, even legends become a part of history. The history of a legend goes forward, not backwards. Whether it happened or not, some people believe it did, and then act on that belief. That part of our desert history is as solid and real as any gold nugget.

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## The Apache Surrender Conference

By Loren Wendt

It was in the Canyon de las Embudos way down in Mexico

They key "players" in the conference were General Crook and Geronimo

The "human tiger" (Geronimo) listened carefully for three days

As Crook informed him that the Apache had to cease their warlike ways

Many of the chiefs who were asked to be there wondered why

And they weren't particularly happy with photographer C. S. Fly

He kept trying to get them to pose but several chose to hide

You see, the Apache may be arrogant, but he still has his pride

The surrender terms that were offered didn't appeal to everyone

And, after three days the negotiations weren't really done

Unfortunately, there was a white man the chiefs hadn't met

But, he got them drunk on mescal, this civilian named Tribollet

Geronimo had agreed to the terms, then had a change of heart

He and Naiche got really, really drunk and decided to depart

Lieutenant Maus started to Chihuahua, and the sober Indians on their way

While Crook had to meet his superiors, and knew what they would say

General Nelson Miles was appointed and took poor Crook's place

But, he also discovered that, when dealing with Geronimo, he would lose face

Well, it was six months later when Geronimo surrendered once and for all

But, down in the Canyon de las Embudos, there is history to recall.

## Hands! Hands! Hands !

*By Loren Wendt*

Search as I might, I simply could not find  
The image of hands that I saw in my mind  
Hands that bespoke of kindness, tenderness  
and care  
But, those kind of hands just never were  
there

His hands were calloused and rough and  
torn  
They were that way from the day he was  
born  
And he was born to hard work on his farm  
Those hands protected him and kept him  
from harm

She was a housewife with hands so plain  
They constantly moved when she tried to  
explain  
Explain that her days were made up of  
work  
Work and chores and she never did shirk

The pianist's hands were soft and long  
He made his piano ring out with glad song  
His fingers moved over the keys with ease  
There wasn't an audience that he couldn't  
please

The magician's hands seemed so rare  
As he plucked cards from out of the air  
But, like all of the others it was not what I  
seek  
I wanted hands unselfish, caring and meek

So, I stopped at a chapel while wending my  
way  
It seemed time to rest to ponder and pray  
And, "lo and behold," the good Father was  
there  
He looked at me with concern and with  
care

His hands were clasped in prayer like this  
And, that was the sight I would not miss  
I had found THE HANDS, ONE OF A  
KIND  
THEY WERE THE IMAGE I SAW IN MY  
MIND!

## The Question?

*By Loren Wendt*

"Whoa, Jenny, whoa!" croaked the farmer  
To his faithful, suffering old gray mare  
"Ain't no use goin' on this way  
Your plain tuckered out and that ain't fair."

He stood there with one hand on the plow  
And he picked up a handful of dusty soil.  
Thinking all those desperate years gone by  
All that suffering and all that useless toil.

"Well, old gal, it looks like this is finally it."  
The farmer's face was laced with aching  
pain.

"Two years — two God-forsaken weary  
years  
And we haven't even had a drop of rain!"

With that he unhitched his trembling Jenny  
From what was left of that beat-up old plow  
"Yep, there ain't a doubt, it's over and done,  
Just have to face what's gonna happen to us  
now."

"Now, I've just got to go and tell me Ella  
Tell her the bank will take this lousy place.  
And, I can just see that awful, suffering look  
So much sorrow will be on that lovely  
face."

So, they headed to the barn, two lonely  
beings  
Two beings who had tried — had done their  
best  
They had toiled and suffered on that land  
But, finally, the two had failed to meet the  
test

Well, he left poor Ella holding her weary  
head  
She was sobbing as if that stout heart would  
break  
That was the worst thing he ever had to do  
It was more than his aching soul could take

So he took the .45 from behind the kitchen  
door  
Then they shuffled to the barn just once  
more



To where his faithful horse stood suffering  
and cold  
He knew what he had to do — knew that for  
very sure

Let me tell you, the sound of that explosion  
Seemed to echo on the Kansas plain  
Then, as fate so often has its peculiar way



Gary Turner, Bill Warren, and Willis Osborne make their requests to Dave Bourne, entertainer for the day, who played on a wonderful old upright pie-ana. Photo by Paul McClure.

Ironically, it finally started to rain!!!  
Now, here's a question we simply have to ask  
But the answer evades us — we will never know  
Was it that faithful old gray mare, poor Jenny  
Or was it the farmer who had to go?????????



Lynn Hodge and Ken Pauley give their best "hard case" poses in the courtyard of the Andrés Pico Adobe. Photo by Paul McClure.

## A Fantastic Fandango

*By Eric Nelson*

The 2012 Los Angeles Westerners Fandango was held in the afternoon on Saturday, June 16, at the Andrés Pico Adobe in Mission Hills.

Entertainment was provided by Dave Bourne, who played at his Saloon Piano. Additional recorded Western music was provided by Paul Rippens. We were also entertained by a well-rounded reading of Cowboy Poetry. Tours of the adobe were made available by docent volunteers. A fixed-price book sale was also provided.

The bar was well-stocked and lively, due to the able efforts of Pete and Charlotte Fries. Dinner was catered by The Bear Pit of Mission Hills. As is usual with Bear Pit catered meals, we had a cornucopia of food, includ-

ing BBQ beef, chicken and ribs, including trimmings such as cole slaw, potato salad, and BBQ beans. There was more than enough food, allowing members to take large quantities home.

Thanks go especially to Richard Doyle for his efforts in securing the use of the Andrés Pico Adobe for this event, after a last-minute change due to the occurrence of events out of our control. In addition to those mentioned above, thanks also to Jan Chik for preparing the invitations, Jim and Amy Macklin for managing the welcome table, and Phil Chik and Tim Heflin for volunteering their efforts as and where they were needed.



Glen salutes the crowd for helping to celebrate his centennial. Photo by Steve Crise.

## Glen Dawson Birthday Celebrations

*By Elizabeth Pomeroy*

A tide of honors, memories, and affection swirled around our friend, Glen Dawson, in a weeklong celebration of his 100th birthday, which was on June 3, 2012. Four events brought together admirers from many parts of Glen's life, each celebration having its own flavor.

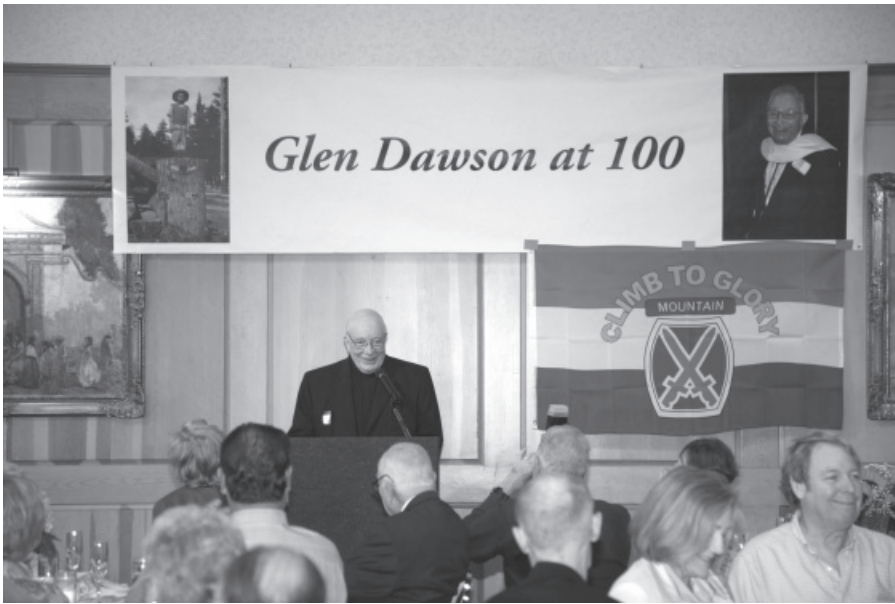
Act One was the birthday luncheon on June 2, at the University Club in Pasadena, attended by 250 friends and relatives. Nick Curry was the spark to initiate and organize the event. He was aided by Stuart F. Robinson, who prepared a display of *The Dawson 80*, a publication listing the eighty most influential works on southern California history from 1770 to 1920 and which was dedicated to Glen. Joining the honoree were his sisters, Fern Dawson Shochat and June Dawson McKeon. Glen's children were there, too, these being Keith Dawson, Karen Dawson Ganske, and Susan Dawson Smith. All present were aware of missing Glen's late brother, Muir, whose widow, Agnes, and son, Michael, did grace the occasion.

The large dining room was filled to overflowing and its thirty-five tables were deco-

rated with an array of flowers. Olivia Curry was the creative spirit behind the floral finery. She and Nick had visited the Los Angeles Flower Mart at dawn, filling up their car with blooms she lovingly arranged.

More than twenty constituencies of Glen's long life joined in this, the largest of the festivities. Among those attending were members of the Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners, of which Glen is the last living charter member from its organization in 1946; the Sierra Club, which Glen joined as a life member in 1921; and the Book Collectors of Southern California, publisher of *The Dawson 80*. Members of the Zamorano Club were there, as well as friends from the Los Angeles City Historical Society; the Pasadena Museum of History; the Historical Society of Southern California; and many librarians, historians, printers and colleagues from the world of books. Also there were fellow mountaineers from Glen's years as a noted climber and Sierra Club member.

As the arriving guests stood in line to register and sign the guest book, Glen joined them by waiting in line with all the others.



Msgr. Francis Weber paid homage to Glen and presented him with a gift from an earlier papal visit.  
Photo by Steve Crise.

Not “pulling rank,” he was a gracious participant at his own party.

The day’s program began with an entrancing PowerPoint review of Glen’s life, including photographs ranging from childhood through the awarding of his honorary Doctor of Humane letters degree from Azusa Pacific University in 2009. Sierra Club member and fellow mountaineer Bob Cates prepared the showing from the Club’s photographic archives.

The program was ably led by Master of Ceremonies Gary Turner with tributes given by Dr. John Carson and Tom Andrews. Eric Nelson, Sheriff of the Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners, also presented a brief tribute to Glen.

Several presentations followed. Monsignor Francis J. Weber gave to Glen a special medallion from Pope John Paul II’s visit to southern California in 1984. Los Angeles City Council member Tom LaBonge presented a proclamation of appreciation for Dawson’s Book Shop being located in the city for 105 years. The shop, which moved through four locations during that time, was Glen’s professional home from 1937 to 1996.

History came alive with the appearance of several members of the famed 10th Mountain Division, a much decorated military unit

serving in the Italian Alps during World War II. Bruce K. Campbell, like Glen a Bronze Star recipient, presented his old comrade with mementos of that famed unit. Glen, a skilled mountaineer at a young age, had helped train members of the 10th Mountain Division in the Rocky Mountains before deploying to the Alps.

Susana Reyes, representing the Sierra Club, spoke of Glen’s many contributions to that venerable conservation organization. He had served on its Board of Directors and advocated broadening its membership base to the strength it has today.

Other landmarks were noted in Glen’s life. He was one of the first booksellers to become a member of the Zamorano Club, was a longtime participant in the Historical Society of Southern California and a publisher of some 370 books with his brother Muir, through Dawson’s Book Shop.

Then followed a proclamation from Pasadena mayor Bill Bogaard and a few heartfelt memories told as the microphone was passed among the guests. Glen had the last word with a brief and warm thanks to all who were there and then concluded with: “I am going home and take a nap.”

An elegant keepsake was presented to the guests as they left. Printed by André



Gary Turner of our corral served as the Master of Ceremonies in his own inimitable style and represented us well. Photo by Steve Crise.

Chaves at the Clinker Press, the illustrated tribute featured a statement by John Burroughs that reads, "I go to books and to nature as a bee goes to the flower, for a nectar that I can make into my own honey."

Act Two of the birthday week took place the next day, June 3, at the Villa Gardens in Pasadena, where Glen lives. This was an informal reception for his extended family members, friends, and Villa Gardens residents to gather and enjoy conversation and the sharing of memories. Two birthday cakes were made for the occasion. Many photographs were taken of Glen surrounded by his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. His grandson, the Reverend Karl L. Ganske, led the religious service earlier that day at the Villa Gardens.

Act Three unfolded at the Zamorano Club meeting on Wednesday, June 6, a dinner held at Pasadena's historic Women's City Club. There, William Lomax presented a slide show on "Memories of 1912," picturing notable events of that year beyond that of Glen's birth.

Then for the main presentation, Dennis Kruska spoke of Glen's amazing mountaineering accomplishments in the 1920s and 1930s, including first ascents of Sierra Nevada peaks and pinnacles. The photographs of those lofty climbs and youthful vigor were a joy to behold—and perhaps a surprise to

those who knew Glen only as the earthbound esteemed bookman of Dawson's Book Shop.

The talk ended with a recently-discovered film reel of Glen and his mountaineering friends demonstrating their climbing skills and techniques some eighty years ago. During the club meeting, David Zeidberg, Director of the Library at the Huntington Library, Art Gallery and Botanical Gardens, read a letter from the very young Glen, acting for Dawson's Book Shop, offering an historical item for the Huntington to consider for purchase. It was the start of a long and fruitful relationship as the scholarly book dealer helped the Huntington Library develop its famed collection.

In a final tribute, Act Four, the illustrated presentation by Dennis Kruska was given to *Los Compadres Con Libros*, the Orange County book club which was meeting at the Sherman Library and Gardens in Corona del Mar on June 9. Friends from Orange County who gathered there knew Glen in many ways, including as a historian and a fellow member of so many southern California book-loving circles.

The week was indeed a bouquet of tributes to an admired friend and his century of accomplishments.



Los Angeles City Council member Tom LaBonge presents Glen with a proclamation from the city. Photo by Steve Crise.





Sheriff Eric Nelson offers his hearty congratulations to Glen Dawson on his 100th birthday. Photo by Steve Crise.

## The L.A. Westerners 100th Birthday Wishes to Glen Dawson

Glen Dawson's interest in assisting in the formation of the Los Angeles Corral had its beginnings in 1946 at Dawson's Book Shop, where Homer Britzman, a publisher and art collector, among other things, and Robert J. Woods, a noted bibliophile, were discussing the possibility of forming an organization on the order of the Chicago Corral of Westerners formed in 1944.

A group of men, including Glen, then met at Britzman's home, the former home of Charles Russell, and before the evening was over, the fundamental principles of the proposed Los Angeles chapter were determined. The organizational meeting was held on December 19, 1946 at the Redwood Café in downtown Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Corral was born. Of those charter members, Glen is the sole survivor.

Following his participation in the formation of the Los Angeles Westerners, Glen's contributions to the Los Angeles Corral continued. Glen has served in appointed and elected offices of the Corral, including Sheriff in 1959. He is an Honorary Member of the Corral.

Glen's literary contributions to the Corral are also many. His first effort appeared in the third issue of Volume One of the Corral's initial publication, *The Brand Book*, in 1947.

In 1948, *The Brand Book*, as a periodical publication, was replaced by a quarterly publication known as *The Branding Iron*. Glen authored the book review section in Volume One, Number One of that publication. In all, Glen has written fourteen book reviews, five articles, and numerous memorials to deceased fellow Westerners. He has also given five speaker presentations to meetings of the Corral.

The Winter 1996 edition of *The Branding Iron* commemorated the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Los Angeles Corral. The lead article was written by Glen, in which he described the founding of the Corral and gave a biographical sketch of each of the charter members, twenty-six in all.

His biographical sketch of himself gives us an idea of what he considered as his most important achievements. Here is what he wrote:

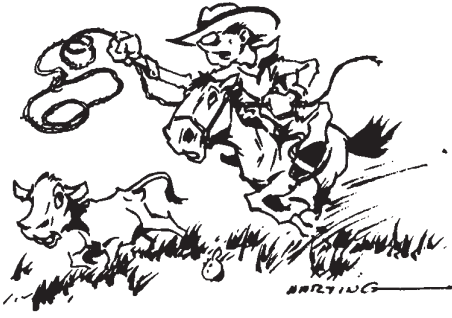
*Glen Dawson (1912- ) was born on the slopes of Mt. Washington, Los Angeles, a partner of Dawson's Book Shop 1936-1995, co-editor with Edwin Carpenter of the Baja California Travels Series. He served as Sheriff in 1959 but is perhaps best known as a pioneer California skier and rock climber.*

Glen, a lot more will have been said about you before this day's end. As for the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners, our heartfelt thanks for joining in the formation sixty-six years ago of an organization so dear to the hearts of your fellow members. We extend a hearty "job well done."

On behalf of the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners, as a token of our appreciation for your fine efforts over the past sixty-six years, I am pleased to advise you that we wish to plant a tree in your honor and in your name. We will seek your advice on the genus of the tree and planting location.

Happy Birthday and our Very Best Wishes for many more.

—Eric Nelson, 2012 Deputy Sheriff



## THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

**April 2012: Philip Nathanson**

Photography historian and collector Philip Nathanson gave an interesting presentation to the Corral about some notable aspects of early southern California photography, principally through the work of W. A. Vale and the Continent Stereoscope Company, both subjects of recent books by the speaker.

Nathanson began by giving a primer on early photography, including formats, methods and other technical aspects that gave a solid grounding for the audience. This included the fact that most early photographs of the southern California area were based on stereoviews and carte de visites (CDVs), with the former mainly embracing images of locations and scenery, while the latter involved portraits.

He then discussed the career of William Adams Vale, based in San Bernardino. As Nathanson noted, though Vale did not leave a large body of work, his surviving images are only a few dozen, he took important shots of railroads, mining, native Americans, agriculture and early prominent locations.



Photo by Steve Crise.

Vale also photographed in San Diego and Los Angeles, in addition to his home county of San Bernardino.

With the Continent Stereoscopic Company, Nathanson impressed upon listeners that the firm's stereoviews in southern California, dating from about 1877, are important records of life in the region before the work of Carleton Watkins, the eminent San Francisco photographer, who took many photographs in the southern part of the state shortly afterwards.

Whereas Vale's surviving portfolio of images is quite small, those from Continent number over seventy and range from Santa Barbara to San Diego and include early views of the fledgling towns of Santa Monica and Pasadena, as well as a number of unidentified views that show missions, farms and orchards, mountain resorts, native Americans and many others.

This talk was an illuminating window into the world of pre-1890 local photography, documenting a southern California region before the great population and land boom of the late 1880s that changed the landscape and how it was documented by the camera.



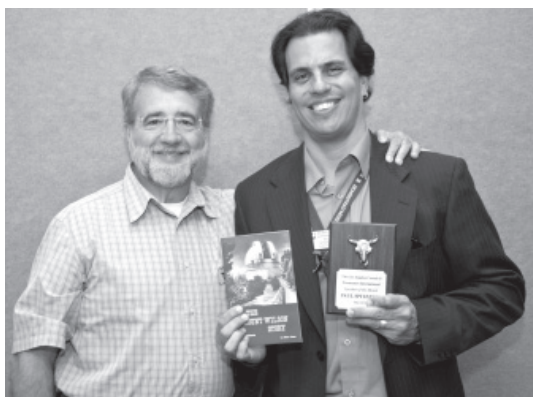


Photo by Steve Crise.

## May 2012: Paul Spitzzeri

Relying heavily on stereoviews such as those discussed by Nathanson the month prior, Spitzzeri gave a fast-paced presentation on the somewhat overlooked growth boom that erupted in the Los Angeles region in the late 1860s and early 1870s.

Tying together demographic change, economic transformations, societal shifts and other aspects, Spitzzeri drew a portrait of a region emerging from a cattle-based economy to an agricultural one. Meanwhile, he elucidated Los Angeles's move from a modest sized town to an emerging small city, while suburban development began in earnest and also reflected sometimes dramatic changes in population, including ethnic makeups. Some attention was also given to efforts to improve the region's image as crime-ravaged, noting that early efforts at the professionalization of law enforcement were made, while major crimes such as the horrendous Chinese Massacre of October 1871 could stymie those attempts at reform.

He also emphasized that emerging industries (such as citrus and oil), transportation

improvements (principally railroads and streetcars), and the consolidation of power by a new European-American majority were central features to the boom and foreshadowed the much larger one that exploded on the local scene in the late 1880s.

As per usual with growth booms, rampant speculation, overpriced land values, poorly managed institutions, including the local bank of Temple and Workman, and other factors led to the bust of late summer 1875 that squelched the growth of the region just prior to the celebration of the American centennial. A long period of stagnation ensued until the completion of a direct trans-continental railroad link a decade later paved



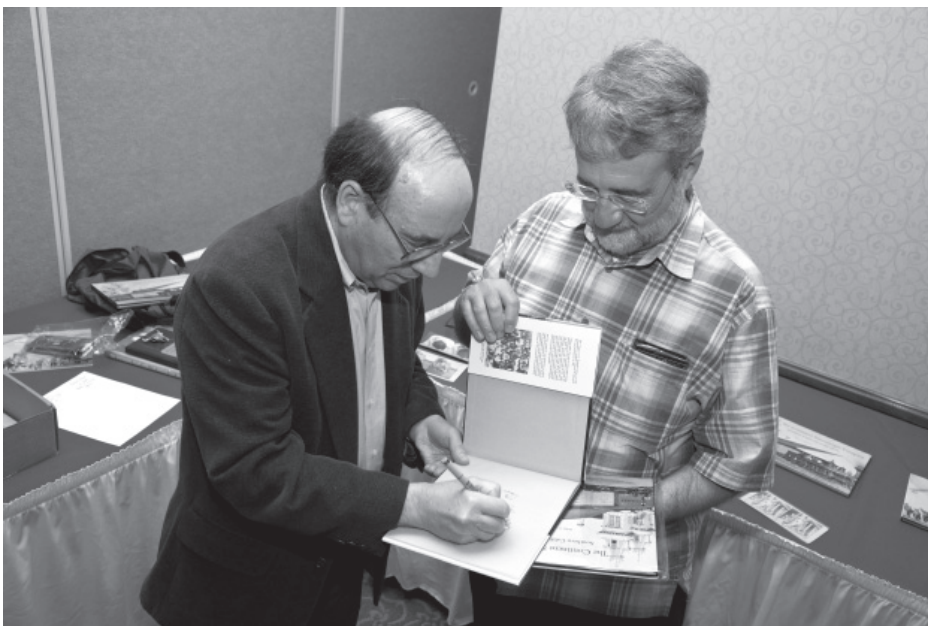
During Paul Spitzzeri's May 2012 talk on Los Angeles' first growth boom during the late 1860s and early 1870s, views such as this were used to show the town's modest transformation. Taken from just west of the historic Plaza, the photo looks towards the southeast and takes in an ox-drawn team on Temple Street, at the right, the clock tower of the Courthouse (now the site of Los Angeles City Hall), and other adobe and brick buildings. The man holding the shotgun on New High Street in the foreground might be a patrolling constable from the city's small police department. The photograph was taken by pioneer Los Angeles photographer William M. Godfrey prior to 1871. Courtesy, Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum.







Deputy Sheriff Joseph Cavallo and April speaker Philip Nathanson pose after an excellent talk on early southern California photography. Photo by Steve Crise.



Nathanson signs a copy of one of his books on early regional photography for an admiring Cavallo. Photo by Steve Crise.

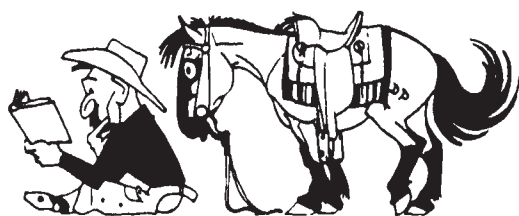




Jan Chik is mesmerized by the 3-D effect of a stereoscopic photograph at the April Roundup after Phil Nathanson's presentation on the subject. Photo by Steve Crise.



A provocative question from a curious Corral member apparently leaves speaker Spitzzeri flummoxed. Photo by Steve Crise.



## DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL ...

**THE CHINATOWN WAR:** *Chinese Los Angeles and the Massacre of 1871* by Scott Zesch. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press,) 2012. xii+283pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography.

The term “definitive” is greatly over-used when it comes to works of history, but it is difficult to imagine anyone being able to improve much upon Scott Zesch’s thorough and balanced examination of the Chinese community of Los Angeles up to the horrific massacre of eighteen Chinese on 24 October 1871 and its aftermath.

Zesch diligently mined the city’s newspapers and those of others throughout the United States and meticulously examined surviving civil and criminal case files to present a detailed portrait of the small, but emerging Chinese community in frontier Los Angeles from the 1850s to the early 1870s. He looks at the social, economic and legal aspects of the community, using all three to develop a framework for understanding the events and personages that led up to the 1871 massacre. When Zesch speculates regarding motivations for actions that cannot be supported by evidence, these are nuanced and reasonable and not overdone.

His coverage of the Massacre is thorough and even-handed. As he acknowledges the inherent problems of sifting out fact from speculation and rumor in the heady turmoil that erupted in the dark evening hours of 24 October, Zesch skillfully analyzes testimony from the coroner’s inquest, grand jury hearing, and trial coverage to give a picture of the events of that terrible evening that is as complete as could be. He gives credit and

blame where it seems likeliest to apply them and also offers alternate scenarios when there is little chance of certainty in distilling what happened during those few hours of horror.

One of Zesch’s greatest attributes in this work is his ability to humanize the individuals involved, when they are too often lost in stereotypes or portrayals using a broad brush. He gives portraits of Chinese community leaders like Sam Yuen and Yo Hing, the unfortunate innocent Massacre victim Dr. Gene Lee Tong, lawyer, judge and likely vigilante leader Robert Widney, who sought to prevent lynchings during the Massacre and others. Moreover, by analyzing in depth the Chinese community and giving a fair appraisal of its upstanding members, as well as the tong leaders and figures whose criminal behavior gave the entire community a bad name among those already disposed to have strong racist feelings against them, Zesch provides a background that makes the Massacre even more shocking and sickening.

The only questionable element to the book is one that tends to be typical among works of history that strive, as all should do, for relevance to today’s readers. That is, there is a readiness by historians and others to make direct links between the Massacre and later events such as the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, the Watts civil unrest of 1965, and the violence that erupted after the Rodney King beating trial in 1992. Whatever one makes of these connections, the fundamental matter is what distinguishes supposition and opinion from historical investigation and the ways in which evidence supports an interpretation.

Aside from this, *The Chinatown War* isn’t just the best work to date on the Chinese massacre and the nascent Chinese community in 19th-century Los Angeles, it is also one of the finest books of any kind relating to Los Angeles in the period. It is highly recommended reading for anyone interested in the specific subject, but also the context of the city and region during a fascinating time.

—Paul Spitzereri

ASSAULT ON THE DEADWOOD STAGE: *Road Agents and Shotgun Messengers*, by Robert K. DeArment. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. 279 pp. Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Hardbound, \$24.95.

In 1878, as one boarded the Cheyenne to Deadwood stage, the driver reminded folks to expect annoyances, discomfort, some hardship, spit to the leeward and check your firearms, for road agents abounded.

*Assault on the Deadwood Stage* captures the battle between the road agents and shotgun messengers, as passengers and gold made their way through the Black Hills of the Dakota and Wyoming Territories. No one was safe or secure when facing the Hat Creek or Tom Price gang. Would Lame Johnny, Persimmon Bill or Big Nose George hold up the stage, lighten your wallet, secure the strongbox or shoot it out with the shotgun messenger?

As the stage holdups and killings escalated, stage and railroad agents faced a formidable task of bringing law and order back to the Black Hills. Gritty men of determination and perseverance, like Scott Davis and Boone May, met the challenge with shotguns and pistols at the ready. Mr. May admitted his corpses were invariably those of undesirable citizens, never law-abiding.

Experience the life and death of being a road agent, realize what drove them to this dangerous profession, how they fared and what led to their demise. Understand the outrage of the citizens of Deadwood and the other boom towns when shotgun messengers or sheriffs were brought down by the road agents' guns. Relive the story behind how the shotgun messengers risked their lives for the stage lines, its passengers and bloodstained gold from the Black Hills.

*Assault on the Deadwood Stage* is a well written and comprehensive account of the events during the late 1870's along the stage lines in the Black Hills. Detailed descriptions of the people and events of the time are relayed. We are afforded the opportunity to understand both sides of the story and the violence that ensued and how law and order was reestablished along the Black Hills stage

lines. The thirty illustrations complement the text showing us the true faces of the West, while the detailed notes and bibliography provide an excellent resource for the reader. *Assault on the Deadwood Stage* has a home on the top shelf in my library.

---Pete Fries

EVERETT RUESS: *His Short Life, Mysterious Death, and Astonishing Afterlife*, by Philip L. Fradkin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. 279 pp. Maps, Illustrations, Acknowledgments, Notes, Appendices, Selected Bibliography, Index. Hardbound, \$24.95

The desert regions of the Southwest U.S. are beautiful and mysterious places. I love the desert. There is much to contemplate and reflect upon there. Everett Ruess travelled these desert areas, wrote poetry, created works of art, and offered much potential as a great interpreter of the desert and further as an explainer of life and the meaning of our existence. One of the great mysteries in that same desert is his never-completely-explained disappearance in 1934.

For those who love mysteries and wonder what happened to Ruess, this work by Philip Fradkin, a first-rate journalist and writer, describes in detail Ruess's background; work and explorations; his disappearance; and the search, review, and subsequent analysis of all data, both in the past and using current methods and scientific research to determine exactly what happened to him. Fradkin is thorough, interesting, concise, opinionated and clear. I was constantly on edge wondering what was next.

The book starts with a tantalizing description of modern-day search for answers about Ruess's disappearance, including the author's own personal research in Davis Gulch, Utah, where searches had centered in 1935. Then, there is background into Ruess's family, a biography and details of his life taking us step by step, carefully described, to the day of his disappearance. Considerable discussion follows about the search, the legacy, the healing, and all the effort expended to explain exactly what happened. Interwoven

in this are quotes from Ruess, explanations as to his near genius creative mind, and the constant reminders of what might have been had he lived. An interesting suggestion and reasons why Ruess might have been homosexual gives open reality to his life. The feeling of loss and pain experienced by Ruess's parents during all the years they searched for their son makes the reading very gripping and personal when one puts oneself in their shoes. They died not knowing what happened to their son.

The final chapter describes in great detail all the work done since 2009 using DNA tests and further excavations of nearby sites where he disappeared; analysis; re-analysis;

conclusions; changes to those conclusions; heated scientific arguments; and the complexity but fallibility of DNA testing. At the end, we still do not know exactly what happened to Everett Ruess.

I like this book because it has told me what I really need to know about Everett Ruess. Reading it has put me into his life, been with him on his trips, understood his thinking, made me his friend and taken me on a journey into his mysterious disappearance. Somehow I have a little better understanding of the meaning of life and our existence.

--Joseph Cavallo



Established in the 1840s and named for dark-skinned Mexicans, Calle de los Negros was a short street southeast of the Plaza that became, by 1870, the residential area of the emerging Chinese community of Los Angeles. This view, from about 1878, shows the north end of the thoroughfare. Scott Zesch's book on the Chinese, reviewed on page 18, includes much information on the Calle and its Chinese inhabitants. Courtesy, Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum.



Taken from the south end of Calle de los Negros by photographer Lemuel S. Ellis about 1885, this view takes in the area that was the flashpoint of the horrific October 1871 massacre of nineteen Chinese at the hands of rioters. A portion of the Coronel Building is at left and this building was the focus of the riot. Shortly after this photo was taken, the city razed the buildings and rerouted the thoroughfare as part of Los Angeles Street. A new Chinatown arose east of Alameda Street, where Union Station's construction in the 1930s forced a relocation to the current Chinatown. Courtesy, Workman and Temple Family Homestead.

