



The DENVER WESTERNERS  
**ROUNDUP**

March - April 2021



*Courtesy Tom Noel Collection*

*The House of Mirrors in 1942, Painting by Herndon Davis*

**Shady Dames of Denver**

*By Katy Ordway*

(presented January 27, 2021)



Courtesy Tom Torgove

Performing as Jennie Rogers at her  
Grave in Fairmont Cemetery 2017,

## Our Author

Katy Ordway graduated from Colorado State University in 2002 with a B.A. in history and education. In 2004 she graduated from the University of Colorado at Denver with an M.A. in History. She has published a book, *Colorado's Rodeo Roots*, as well as a number of articles on history in Jefferson County in the magazine *Historically Jeffco*. She currently teaches Colorado history at Red Rocks Community College.

# THE DENVER WESTERNERS ROUNDUP

VOL. LXXVII NO. 2



March - April 2021

### 2021 OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Sheriff: Robert (Bob) Easterly  
Deputy Sheriff, Program Chairman: Mark Barnhouse  
Past Sheriff: Everett Brailley  
Roundup Foreman: (Secretary) Kathenne Dines  
Tallyman: (Treasurer) Flora DuFree  
Registrar of Marks & Brands: (Roundup Editor) Rick Barth  
Chuck Wrangler: Joe Sokolowski  
Rosenstock Awards Chair: Tom Noel  
Ken Gaunt Fund Chair: Bob Lane  
Archivist: Kellen Cutsforth  
Membership Chair: Roger Dudley  
Keeper of the Possibles Bag: Dennis Hagen  
Book Review Editor: Dan Shannon  
Roundup Production: David Emrlich  
Trustee: John Stewart

### Submissions for *The Roundup*

Rick Barth [rulhandrck0@gmail.com](mailto:rulhandrck0@gmail.com)  
4646 County Rd 72 303-838-6687  
Bailey, CO 80421

### Book Reviews

Dan Shannon [dan-shannon@comcast.net](mailto:dan-shannon@comcast.net)  
927 E. 23rd Ave 303-717-1377  
Denver, CO 80205

### Dues and Donations

Roger Dudley [rogdud@comcast.net](mailto:rogdud@comcast.net)  
3175 S. Beeler St. 303-752-2511  
Denver, CO 80231-6403

### Reservations for Meetings

Joe Sokolowski [jsokolo102@aol.com](mailto:jsokolo102@aol.com)  
2351 East Iowa Ave home 303-778-8324  
Denver, CO 80210 cell 720-317-5366

The *Roundup* (ISSN 2078-7970) is published bi-monthly by the Denver Posse of Westerners, Inc., founded Jan 25, 1945. Subscription is included with payment of the current membership fee of \$35 per year due on January 1. Content is based on oral presentations given at monthly Westerners meetings. Submission of a manuscript is encouraged, but publication cannot be guaranteed. Submissions must be in digital format and must follow guidelines provided by the Westerners. All submissions are subject to revision and/or correction at the editor's discretion. Every effort is made to ensure accuracy of content but such accuracy is the ultimate responsibility of the author.

Periodical postage is paid at Denver, CO. Printed by Unique Litho Denver, CO.

QUESTIONS? Should you have any questions concerning the *Roundup* or the Denver Westerners, please email Roger Dudley at [rogdud@comcast.net](mailto:rogdud@comcast.net)

© 2021 by the Denver Posse of Westerners, Inc.  
Registered as a Colorado Corporation

## Shady Dames of Denver

By Katy Ordway

Gold was discovered in what would become Arvada by Louis Ralston in June 1850. Eight years later, William Green Russell and his party found gold in Dry Creek and the Platte River. This event marked the beginning of an influx of settlers into the region. One of these earliest settlers set up shop as the first prostitute in Denver. Her name was Ada Lamont, and though she might be credited as the first, her story is just one of many intriguing tales of women surviving in the expanding city, many of whom faced tragedy, with a few even achieving wealth and fame. She had been happily married as the wife of a minister when disaster struck. Lamont's husband and another woman disappeared during the journey to the Rocky Mountains. She, like the rest of the party, assumed the worst, that they had run off together. So Lamont decided to fend for herself. "As a God-fearing woman, you see me for the last time. As of tomorrow, I start the first brothel in this settlement. Any of you men in need of a little fun will always find the flaps of my tent open."<sup>1</sup> What began in a tent eventually grew to one of the first brothels in Denver. She turned from faith to flesh and became a raving financial success.

She operated for ten years in the nascent city of Denver. Her life was quite happy until a skeleton with a hole in its head and a Bible were discovered. The inscription found in the book was from Ada to her husband. The revelation that her husband had been killed and had not abandoned Lamont caused her to have a breakdown. She turned to alcohol and lost interest in her business. She died soon after in Georgetown, alone and penniless. Her rise and fall mirrored that of the region. By 1860, there were over 32,000 men and about 1,500 women, according to the US Census of that year. With the mining boom and the gender imbalance, the fledgling town's conditions were ripe for the world's oldest profession to thrive.

Women who joined the ranks of the soiled doves of Denver in this period ranged from a horrifying thirteen years of age to an ancient fifty. The average for most of these women was about twenty-one years old.<sup>2</sup> Becoming a soiled dove was a profession that most chose as a last resort, and as such, many of these women



Courtesy History Colorado, Fred M. Mazzulla Collection, 10027280

Denver crib girls

would change names and locations often. Because of the shame associated with this trade, it was hard for historians to track the life stories of so many fallen women, not even those who were integral to the building of the West. These women were shunned by society and only had each other and a few animal companions to act as a support system.

Is it any wonder that many turned to drink, or to more potent substances, to cope with the business's tedium? Boredom, depression, violence and fear of pregnancy and disease marked the days. These women were referred to by editor William N. Byers of the *Rocky Mountain News* as "sisters of misfortune" and "nymphs of frailty."<sup>3</sup> During the day, women would engage in needle point or card games to pass the daylight hours. If that were not enough to alleviate the tedium, alcohol was abundant in saloons, brothels and cribs where prostitution occurred. For a typical trip to a bawdy house, the men would be encouraged to indulge in a drink or several before engaging in the main event. Women were expected to drink with their clients and some of the crib girls supplemented their wages by selling drinks. For some the kick of champagne was not enough, and opium was a favorite of many. Accessing drugs like this was easy, and many women accidentally, or in some cases deliberately overdosed to end it all. Suicide by rat poison, such as the popular arsenic-based brand Rough on Rats, was also a common occurrence.

One of the most famous suicides was a madam named Ella Wellington. She briefly ran the notorious House of Mirrors brothel in 1894, subletting it from Jennie Rogers. Wellington had married Fred Brouse but was dissatisfied with her unadventurous life.<sup>4</sup> She had left behind so-called wedded bliss and two stepchildren in Nebraska to run off with another man. She soon found herself as a working woman in Denver who quickly moved up the ranks, and for a time, was able to run the House of Mirrors. Her old life caught up with her when she ran into old friends who let her know that her abandoned spouse had recovered, remarried, and was doing fine.

Mr. Brouse's happiness did not sit well with Ms. Wellington. She reacted by choosing to get dressed in her finest clothes and most expensive jewelry. Allegedly she was wearing a necklace worth \$2,000 that night. She paraded around the parlor, threatening to "blow her brains out."<sup>5</sup> This would be a threat she would see through in her bedroom with the Arapahoe County Deputy Clerk asleep in her bed. Her funeral was an elaborate affair with many attending. One of her suitors named Fredrick Sturges was so devastated that he kept returning to her gravesite at Riverside Cemetery. Eventually he succumbed to his depression and committed suicide by overdose while curled next to her headstone.<sup>6</sup> In his pockets was found a photo of Ella and a letter that begged, "Bury this picture of my own dear Ella beside me."<sup>7</sup> His dying wish was honored and they are buried next to each other. Today, ghost hunters patrol the House of Mirrors, hoping to spot her ghost, as hers is the only recorded death at this address.

For those who persevered in the lifestyle, stopping the spread of disease and preventing pregnancy were vital skills. Laura Evens, a famous madame in Salida, describes in quite graphic and rather crude details in her taped interviews with Fred Mazzulla the precautions she would take in examining a client for disease. She would then go on and attempt to sanitize before engaging in any bawdy activities.<sup>8</sup> While condoms were available, they were expensive and rarely used. Disease would inhibit a girl's ability to make money. In the higher-end houses, doctors would make weekly visits and perform regular

exams to ensure that everyone was disease-free. The treatments for venereal disease were relatively primitive and often involved toxic substances such as mercury. Birth control was also rudimentary and, due to the Comstock Act, challenging to acquire. Vaseline strategically applied was a standard and easy-to-access method of contraception. When that failed, the same doctors who performed the exams could also provide abortions for a fee.<sup>9</sup>

What was referred to as "The Row" in Denver was the center of the action as far as the flesh trade was concerned. Originally named McGaa Street, the name was changed to Halliday Street after one of the more prominent citizens of the region. The location was ideal for the business as it was found in the center of Denver and within walking distance from Union Station. This was key in an era



*Courtesy Denver Public Library, X-2885'*

*At Right, two Pedestrians and a Bicyclist go past 2020 Market St., the bordello owned by Lillis Lovell*

before the automobile, which made getting from point A to B easy. It was also close to many of the hotels on 17<sup>th</sup> Street and generated considerable foot traffic. Early on in Denver's history, it was also close to the old city hall on Larimer and 15<sup>th</sup> Street. There are many tales of government meetings adjourning quickly so everyone could go check out the newest hot spot opening up that week.

As the street became synonymous with prostitution, the Halliday family demanded the city change the name again as the street became infamous. The name "Market Street" was born. At its height, over 480 listed prostitutes made their homes here.<sup>10</sup> Within the business, there was a distinct hierarchy. Prostitution was one of the rare professions where a woman tended to start at the top and work her way down to the bottom of the heap. At the pinnacle were the fancy parlor houses. The madams ran these, and the girls who worked there were the most expensive. They were expected to be clean and well-spoken and dressed in the most fashionable clothes. As a young lady "tumbled down the Row,"<sup>11</sup> the period's favored phrase, a soiled dove's life would become harder. After this, it was generally off to work in a small house. These were often run by a single proprietress or a shared endeavor with a few friends. From here, the next step was to a crib run by a single operator. A final stop would be as a "Two-Bit Girl," charging little and providing your services in alleys with little assurance of privacy. For most girls, a career would last an average of five to seven years. Life on the Row did not allow for longevity.

Crime was a problem for everyone on the Row. The women of Market Street often found themselves either the victim or the perpetrator depending on circumstances. Theft was the most common crime committed. Some houses had it set up to steal a man's money while he was otherwise occupied. His pants pockets could more easily be picked while he was not occupying them. This particular con would require an accomplice who would hide in the room waiting for the right moment. Often, it was the girls who found their clients stealing all of their hard-earned money after services were provided. In one infamous case, Belle Warden murdered and killed a client in 1888. She was sentenced to ten years of hard labor in Central City for her transgressions.<sup>12</sup>

Market Street was also the site of a cluster of killings in 1894. Three women were killed in the same manner within months of each other, possibly the victims of an early serial killer. The three women were killed in September, October, and November of that year. Lena Tapper, a woman of German descent, was the first victim. She was found in her own home, strangled with her own skirt. Nothing was stolen, and there was no evidence of any sexual activity.<sup>13</sup> A month later, on the same side of Market Street just a few doors down, Marie Contassot was found with her eyes bulging and a length of rope nearby. The cause of death was listed as "unknown."<sup>14</sup>

There were a few suspects for this death. Contassot was born in France. She and her sister were involved with a policeman who may have also been her pimp. One theory floated was that she was killed for leaving her previous employer. There was also a theory that her sister had been involved in her death due to a future inheritance.<sup>15</sup> Both were cleared of the crime, but a panic ensued on the Row. A large angel statue was erected at Riverside Cemetery to honor Contassot's life. Sadly, the statue has been vandalized many times over the years and today is no longer at the site of her grave.

As for the women who plied their trade on "Strangler's Row," terror descended. Those that could afford to, either barred the widows or closed up shop. Those who could not afford to were forced to work the flesh trade while local papers wrote of a Jack the Ripper stalking the streets of Denver. The panic was exacerbated by discovering a third victim a few more doors down from Contassot's previous home a month later. Kiku Oyama was a Japanese prostitute known for her petite frame and exotic looks. She, too,



*Courtesy Tom Noel Collection*

*The Angel decorating Marie Contassot's  
Grave at Riverside Cemetery*

was buried at Riverside. For a while, police stepped up enforcement patrols of the area, but the killer was never found. Eventually, life returned to what passed for normal in the red-light district. After all, there was money to be made.

At its heart, this was a business. While the vast majority toiled for poverty wages, there were fortunes to be made for a select few. The cost of a typical encounter varied.<sup>16</sup> At the lower end were those who performed in alleys for a quarter, and spanned to those whose services commanded around \$10. The women who operated in the lower echelons of the trade were more likely to be tipped at the end of an evening, while those who worked at the higher-end houses found the clients had spent so much money downstairs that there was no money left for a gratuity. For those on the lower-end of the hierarchy, the money they made had to cover all the basics of food and shelter.

Those in the brothels found their expenses were much more elaborate and that half of the fees they earned went to the madame off the top.<sup>17</sup> In addition to this cut, the women were obligated to pay for room and board. They were fed fairly well for the era and the grocery bills that could be run up for a high-end house were pretty impressive for the period. Jennie Rogers's last bill for food before her death was \$81 and steak was on the menu.<sup>18</sup> Well fed, the employees of these houses were also required to dress in the first state of fashion. Their looks were part of the marketing that madams used to bring in clients. Many madams, including Jennie Rogers and Mattie Silks, often got a commission on the gowns ordered by their houses' residents. Adding cost to cost, many a dress maker added on fees for these less than respectable clients. Many of the women found themselves in debt and financially controlled by their employers.

The madams themselves were often essential drivers of the local economy. They paid higher rents for their properties and higher prices for the goods they purchased to run their houses. They also made sure to donate to charity and pay all legal fees and fines promptly.<sup>19</sup> For many a municipality, the easiest way to raise funds without raising taxes was to arrest the working girls of a town and fine them. Fining the prostitutes was a great way to fill the city's coffers without raising taxes. Prostitution was technically illegal, but the vast majority of elected officials looked the other way or were often prominent clients. Madams also were job creators who kept many off the streets. Living in one of the fancy



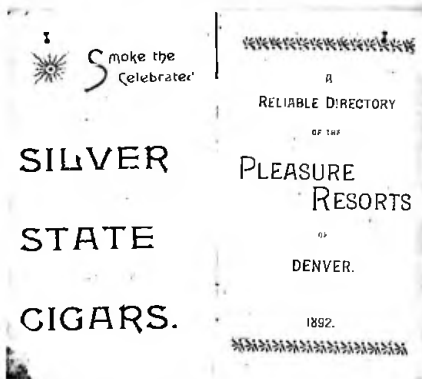
*Courtesy History Colorado, Accession #10037401  
Jennie Rogers, First Owner of the  
House Of Mirrors at 1942 Market St*

houses may have cost a bit in rent, but it also offered protection. Madams provided meals and a hired security force and, in some cases, musical entertainment.

These entrepreneurs were also responsible for marketing and public relations for their businesses. The *Denver Red Book* was originally published in 1892. The creation of this book coincided with the opening of the Brown Palace Hotel.<sup>20</sup> Within this book's pages were the listings for every house of ill repute in the city. A few copies remain today in the archives of the Denver Public Library. This publication allowed madams to purchase ads, drive more foot traffic into their businesses and earn more revenue. When the Democratic National Convention came to Denver in 1908, one of the city's selling points was how many bordellos the city could boast about contained within its limits. There was no mention of this for the DNC 100 years later, however.<sup>21</sup> Another form of marketing for the flesh trade was a law passed that required all prostitutes to wear a yellow armband.<sup>22</sup> The astute self-promoters of the demimonde of Denver took this as an opportunity to dress in this flashy color from head to toe and drive around the streets drumming up more business.

The opening of the Mr. Brown's famous hotel across from the capitol building would provide a new opportunity for profit. Denver was a city with a hidden network of tunnels that were used to transport coal, and if you chose the right site, they could also provide discrete entry and exit for those who wished to have a good time without it making the newspapers. The Brinker Collegiate Institute building, designed by Frank E. Edbrooke, was well situated. It began its life as a school for girls located at 1725-1727 Tremont Street. This was short lived, and quickly went co-educational before shutting down with the death of Mr. Brinker.

It would then become the Hotel Richelieu before being lost in a poker game and reinventing itself as The Navarre, a school for girls of a very different sort. Its owner, Owen LeFevre, saw that there was an underground passage between his building and the Brown.<sup>23</sup> The tunnels would allow for the hotel to operate profitably as a brothel for many years. Eventually, newspaper reporters did grow wise to the trick and would wait on the Brown side to see who would emerge. With prostitution becoming illegal during



*Courtesy History Colorado Fred M. Mazzulla Collection. 30003747  
The 1892 Edition of the Denver Red Book*



the Progressive era, the Navarre would have to go legit. It operated as a property hotel and dining club that was famous for its lobster. Today it is an art gallery owned by Phil Anschutz that features many of the Western art pieces he has collected.<sup>24</sup>

The Navarre never had a proprietress that made headlines, but back on Market Street many made a name for themselves. Jennie Rogers was one of the most famous madams in Denver. She was also one of the wealthier citizens for a time. At her death, her estate was worth \$200,000.<sup>25</sup> Her real estate holdings were all over the city, and the most famous property of all was her House of Mirrors on Market St. In 1909, her bill for liquor for three and half months was \$310. She most likely sold it for about \$3,000.<sup>26</sup> The nearly 1000% markup on alcohol sales was a huge revenue generator for business women like Rogers, and with inflation today would be around \$77,000 of mostly profit.



*Courtesy History Colorado, Buckwalter collection, 81058*  
*The Brinker Collegiate Institute Building is across the street from an empty lot where the Brown Palace will soon be built.*

Born Leah Tehme, Jennie Rogers first came to Denver from St. Louis in 1879. Early in 1880 she made a splash as she bought her first house at 527 Halliday for \$4,600. Shortly after that, she was arrested for "unladylike conduct in the street."<sup>27</sup> Later that same year, the passionate horsewoman was laid up after a bad accident due to recklessly racing her animals through Denver's streets. In 1884 she was arrested "for being a professional morphine taker."<sup>28</sup> Despite her reputation, her business continued to grow and she quickly outgrew her first house and outshone her rival, Mattie Silks. Her success led her to build the famous House of Mirrors. Today, it still stands at 1942 Market Street. According to legend, Rogers acquired her financing for this building through blackmail.<sup>29</sup>

The story goes that she threatened to frame a former lover for murder unless he came up with the \$17,000 needed. The façade of the building was decorated with many faces. At the time, many claimed the stone sculptures represented figures from her past and her reluctant financier. This story's veracity will most likely never be proven but adds to the mythology of her life. Around 1889, she married Jack Wood.<sup>30</sup> Wood was a bartender, and the two had met and developed a relationship around a shared love of horses. Soon after their marriage, she purchased a saloon for him to run. It was in Salt Lake City, allowing her to continue to run her business without too much interference from her spouse.

The arrangement would soon lead to disaster, as Jennie discovered her husband in a compromising position on a visit to Utah. According to the police report, in her own words, "I shot him because I loved him."<sup>31</sup> For obvious reasons, this caused an estrangement in their union. They did reconcile before Jack died in 1896 at thirty-eight years of age.<sup>32</sup> They are buried together at Fairmont Cemetery. Marriage did not slow down her business. Rogers' continued to wheel and deal within the real estate markets of Denver. She had great success and her name was listed on many properties throughout her life.

However, it seems that widowhood threw her for a loop. With her failing health and the diagnosis of kidney disease, Wood's death was the catalyst for Jennie to fade from the Denver scene for a time. Due to the altitude-causing edema from her Bright's Disease, she moved to Chicago, where she met Archibald Fitzgerald. They eventually married in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1904. Unfortunately, Fitzgerald already had a wife. Besides being a bigamist, he was also a spendthrift. With her body failing near the end of her life, Jennie was forced to return to Denver and the House of Mirrors to support herself.<sup>33</sup> She passed in 1909. Her estate was torn apart by her erstwhile second husband, and her beloved House of Mirrors eventually ended up under Mattie Silks' stewardship.

Mattie Silks arrived in Georgetown, Colorado, around 1875. She bragged that she began her career at the top. "I went into the sporting life for business reasons and for no other. It was a way for a woman in those days to make money, and I made it. I considered myself then and I do now—as a businesswoman. I operated the best houses in town and I had as my clients the most important men in the West."<sup>34</sup> After a presumed marriage to either George or Casey Silks (the record is unclear), she arrived in Denver around two years later. While the marriage did not last, she would use the name Silks to her dying day. Her maiden name is still unknown. There are rumors that Silks had a child with one of these two men, but what is known for sure is that this timeframe was when she met Cortez "Cort" Thompson. She and Thompson would engage in a tempestuous affair for the rest of his life, despite his marriage to another woman when they first met.



Courtesy History Colorado. Accession # 10026978  
 Mattie Silks, Queen of the Red Light District  
 for many years

The two would eventually marry four days after hearing Thompson's first wife had died. With the formalizing of this relationship in 1884,<sup>15</sup> Silks had signed on to financially supporting this spendthrift for the rest of his life.

Thompson was a gambler and a foot racer with a tendency towards violence. The relationship between the two was entirely unhealthy, and there were many instances of violence and very public infidelity. One of the most infamous events was the famed duel between Mattie Silks and Kate Fulton. The catalyst was Silks finding Fulton, a rival madam, and Thompson in a compromising position. According to one account found in the *Denver Daily Times*, Thompson "struck Kate Fulton a blow in the face."<sup>16</sup> This event led to a melee between Silks, Thompson, Fulton, and Fulton's lover Sam Thatcher. After the dust settled as Thompson was driving home, someone took a shot at him. A differing account appeared in the *Rocky Mountain News*, whereby a stray bullet hit



Courtesy Tom Noel Collection  
Business Card of Mattie Silks

Thompson during the drunken brawl. Over the years, the story has become much more salacious, with tall tales of two topless madams fighting over a man.

This particular duel was not the only incident involving Silks and a shooting. Although, like many of these stories, a heavy dose of skepticism is required. Lillie Dab was a prostitute in Denver. She had also known Thompson before he met Silks. What is known for certain is that catching the two in bed together caused Mattie to file for divorce citing infidelity and many instances of physical abuse. An example from the divorce petition reads, "at their residence in Denver, the said Defendant, without any fault on her part, or any real provocation being given, assaulted this Plaintiff, knocked her down, blackened her eye, beat her face and body and kicked her while she was lying on the floor in a most cruel and brutal way."<sup>17</sup> Allegedly Silks, who was always known to carry a small pistol, took a pot shot at Dab, missing her but cutting off a lock of hair.<sup>18</sup>

Silks later withdrew her divorce petition, but she did purchase a ranch near Wray, Colorado<sup>19</sup> for Thompson to run, away from the many temptations Denver had to offer. They would remain together until Cort's death from bad oysters in April 1900. Even their last moments together were stormy. "Damn you, Mattie," old-timers around Wray quoted Cort as saying. "You hired that fellow to poison me. If I had a gun I'd kill you." Mattie supposedly responded, "All right, Cort," drawing the pistol she always

carried and placing it in his hand. "If you're going to die, I don't want to live."<sup>40</sup> After Thompson's death, Silks would take up with John Ready, and today she is buried under the name Martha Ready at Fairmont Cemetery.<sup>41</sup>

The end of Mattie Silks' life coincides with the end of the glamorous era of high-end brothels in Denver. She acquired the famous House of Mirrors around 1911, making her the undisputed queen of the Row.<sup>42</sup> She cemented her reign by tiling her name on her famous rival's old house's front stoop, but the victory was short-lived. By 1915, the authorities began the so-called boarding houses' shutdown leaving madams like Silks without the expected income stream. The House of Mirrors would be sold again in 1919 to a Japanese buyer. The building would become a Buddhist Monastery until 1948.<sup>43</sup> Today the building stands next to the bar LODOs and can be rented for special occasions. The mirrors are gone, and the upstairs bedrooms are no more. As for Mattie herself, she would last until 1929. During her life, she claimed that she would only drink



Courtesy Tom Noel Collection

*Tri-state Buddhist Temple Stairs in  
the Former House of Mirrors, 1947*

champagne, a habit that was perhaps the reason for her fall on Christmas Day 1928. She was taken to Denver General Hospital and would pass away early the next year.

While prostitution remains illegal today, it did not just disappear from Denver. Where once someone could visit a legal brothel, in the modern era, it has moved to the streets, the back pages of independent newspapers and of course the Internet, where anything can be found with the right search query. The soiled doves of Denver certainly left behind an unforgettable story, matching or surpassing the tenacity shown by other early settlers of Colorado.

## ENDNOTES

1. Wommack, Linda, *Our Ladies of the Tenderloin: Colorado's Legends in Lace*. Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 2005. p. 80.
2. MacKell, Jan, *Brothels Bordellos. & Bad Girls: Prostitution in Colorado 1860-1930*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2004. p. 6.

3. Secrest, Clark. *Hell's Belles Prostitution Vice and Crime in Early Denver. With a Biography of Sam Howe, Frontier Lawman*, Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2002, p. 73.
4. MacKell, p. 63.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
6. "The Fool Didn't Die," *Aspen Daily Times*, August 25, 1894.
7. Secrest, p. 229.
8. Beach, Tracy. *My Life as a Whore: The Biography of Madam Laura Evens 1871-1953*, Denver, CO: Bower House, 2015, p. 45.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
10. MacKell, p. 58.
11. *Ibid.*, p.12.
12. Benham, Marjorie A.. *Women in the Colorado State Penitentiary 1873-1916*, University of Colorado at Denver Thesis, 1998, p. 2.
13. Secrest, p. 276.
14. MacKell, p. 64.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
17. Bancroft, Caroline. *Six Racy Madams of Colorado. Bancroft Booklets*. 1965, p. 6.
18. *Ibid.*,
19. MacKell, p. 7.
20. *A Reliable Directory of the Pleasure Resorts of Denver*, Denver, Colorado, 1892.
21. Noel, Thomas, "Once Every 100 Years," *The Denver Post*, May 8, 2008.
22. MacKell, p. 60.
23. History Colorado, <https://www.historycolorado.org/location/brinker-collegiate-institute-navarre>.
24. Anschutz Collection <https://anschutzcollection.org/about-us/navarre-building>.
25. *Bancroft Booklets*, p. 30.
26. *Ibid.*, p 6.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
28. Secrest, p. 237.
29. Wommack, p. 48.
30. MacKell, p. 60.
31. *Bancroft Booklets*, p. 20.
32. Mackell, p. 68.
33. *Bancroft Booklets*, p. 26.
34. Secrest, p. 234.
35. Secrest, p. 218.
36. "A Free Fight," *Denver Daily Times*, August 25, 1877.
37. Secrest, p. 231.
38. Parkhill, Forbes, "The Scarlet Lady," *The Denver Post*, "Empire Magazine," June 10, 1951.
39. Secrest, p. 232.
40. MacKell, p. 249.
41. *Bancroft Booklets*, p. 38.
42. Bancroft p 38
43. Secrest, p. 233.

# Over the Corral Rail

*Compiled by Ed Bathke. Please submit your items of news, etc. to Ed.  
Deadline is the 10<sup>th</sup> of the first month in the date of publication.*

"Fossil Finds at Corral Bluffs Open Space" by Jackie Hilaire was the February program for the Pikes Peak Posse. This find in 2019 shook the paleontological world; this was the first time any scientist has been able to describe how the globe recovered from a massive die-off 66.031 million years ago, was the event that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs and the rise of the mammals. The Corral Bluffs Alliance (CoBA) has been leading hikes and guided tours since 2007. As a founding member of CoBA and current President of the Board, Jackie "Jax" Hilaire provided an introduction to the fossil discovery and answered questions about the area.

The Colorado Corral of Westerners March presentation was "The Pioneering Jewish Colony of Cotopaxi," by Nancy Oswald. This attempt by a unique group of Russian Jewish immigrants at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains faced many challenges and hardships. The Cotopaxi Colony was brief, but the colonists went on to successful lives in other parts of Colorado. Nancy's first historical fiction book, *Nothing Here but Stones*, based on the colony, won the Willa Cather Award, was a Spur finalist, and was named a Notable Book for a Global Society. Nancy Oswald writes mostly historical fiction and nonfiction for young readers, end lives on the family ranch south of Cotopaxi.



## Westerners Bookshelf



*Our cup runneth over! Perhaps due to pandemic restrictions our members have been reading and reviewing more books on Western Americana. This issue provides an ample selection, hopefully whetting your appetite for some of these recent publications.*

**Crossroads of Change—The People and the Land of Pecos** by Cori Knudten and Maren Bzdek. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman OK, 2020. 206 pages, maps, photographs, bibliography, index. Softcover \$19.95.

Termed an environmental history of the land that is now Pecos National Historical Park, *Crossroads of Change: The People and the Land of Pecos*, by Cori Knudten and Maren Bzdek is not simply a story of the natural environment. The authors explain that an environmental history is a historical narrative that examines familiar human stories through a new lens. This perspective allows us to explore the relationships of people and nature over time.



The story begins with the Native people of the Pecos area and how they lived before the arrival of Europeans. The arrival of the Spanish in the 1500s brought conquest and settlement, with disease, warfare and forced labor. By the 1800s, Pecos had become part of the United States, placing the inhabitants in a difficult position as the American people debated whether slavery should expand into the territories of the West. The Civil War reached the area with an important battle at nearby Glorieta Pass in 1862.

In the early 20th century, a rodeo star operated a dude ranch and a Hollywood movie star created a vacation hideaway for herself among the pines at Pecos. The centuries-old Pecos Pueblo and ruined church was designated a New Mexico monument, then a national monument, and finally, a national historical park.

Archaeologists may know Pecos best for the Pecos Conference. United States Archaeologist Alfred V. Kidder organized the first Pecos Conference on Southwestern Archaeology on the ranch in 1927. At the conference, Kidder proposed the classification system to assign ancient Pueblo sites to broad time periods on the basis of pottery types, cultural materials, and architectural styles.

Through the years, Pecos Indians and Hispanic residents have navigated conflicts over land use and adapted to newcomers including tourists and the National Park Service itself. Concerns over access to sacred sites and the colorful directive regarding the Forked Lightning Ranch—"Don't fancy this place up"—are emblematic of the respect for local harmonies and environmental stewardship.

The authors did not "fancy up" this history. At just over 200 pages, it gives a rather comprehensive overview in an enjoyable and readable way. The extensive bibliography will be valuable to readers wanting to learn more.

– Kimberly Fic

**Thunder in the West—The Life and Legends of Billy the Kid** by Richard Etulain. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman OK, 2020. 387 pages. Hardcover \$29.9.

Of the desperadoes of the West, one of the most researched is Billy the Kid. Billy lived twenty-one years and according to some accounts killed twenty-one men. Richard Etulain has written the definitive Billy the Kid story.

Henry McCarty was born in New York around 1859. His father may have become a casualty in the Civil War. His mother remarried William Antrim in 1873, and Henry became Henry Antrim. The Antrim family moved to the West, eventually settling in Silver City, New Mexico. Upon his mother's death Henry, although just a teenager, moved to Arizona.

When a much bigger man bullied him, Henry shot and killed him. Fleeing from the law he moved back to New Mexico, eventually settling in Lincoln County, where to confuse pursuers he began to use the name Billy Bonney. Some of his acquaintances, due to his youth and slight stature, began to refer to him as Billy "the Kid."

An English rancher name John Tunstall gave Billy what he needed: a job, a horse and a gun. When



Tunstall was murdered in April 1878 Billy vowed revenge. Billy was involved in the killing of the County Sheriff, William Brady, as well as some others.

In 1880 another Sheriff of Lincoln County was elected, and he set out to bring Billy the Kid to justice for the killing of Sheriff Brady. The book deals with the chase and final capture of the fugitive. Billy was tried for Brady's murder, and sentenced to hang, however he managed to escape from prison. The climax occurs about the mid-point of the book when the new sheriff, Pat Garret, tracked him down, shot and killed him.

The rest of the book, as the title implies, concerns the many legends which grew up around the Kid. The author divides them into three eras. From his death until the mid-1920s he was portrayed as a bloodthirsty desperado. This was especially true in the "dime novels" which began to appear within a year of his death, as well as in several early books. From 1925 until about 1950 some books appeared which gave a softer side of Billy. This was also the time of the increasing popularity of movies, some of which portrayed the Kid almost as a western Robin Hood. After the WWII in what the author calls "the bifurcated Billy" the literature and films tend to treat both sides of Billy's complex character, not in an either-or way as earlier, but a both-and fashion.

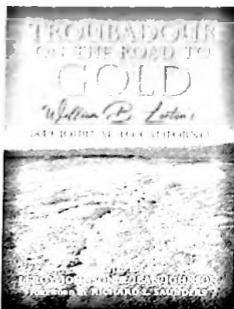
The author has included pictures of almost all of the people that affected the Kid's life, as well as some maps which make it easier to follow the locations of places mentioned in the book. He also includes an extensive bibliography of the books, articles, and films referenced in his book. This is a professionally written book for anyone who has an interest in Billy the Kid, the Lincoln County War, or Southwestern history—a useful addition to their bookshelf.

— Tom Morton

**Troubadour on the Road to Gold—William B. Lorton's 1849 Journal to California** edited by Leroy & Jean Johnson. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City UT, 2020. 51 pages, photos, maps, index. Hardcover \$45.00

The Gold is this book itself. Let me explain. An illustrious departed member of our Denver Posse of Westerners, Fred A. Rosenstock, worked with noted Oregon Trail historian Dale L. Morgan of the Bancroft Library to gather trail journals to support the publication of *The Overland Diary of James A. Prichard from Kentucky to California in 1849*. Rosenstock was the publisher in 1959. The Morgan effort on the Prichard journal was most noted for a spreadsheet appendix that marked the arrival of all known trail journalists as they reached noted landmarks on the routes to Oregon and California during the travel season of 1849. To make this spreadsheet, Morgan and the staff at the Bancroft spent years tracking down all the known journals of those travelers. One journal that came to light late in the Prichard process was the discovery of the William B. Lorton journal.

Morgan spent the last years of his life making as an exact copy of Lorton's five-volume pencil written journals. Lorton had an extremely small writing style, difficult to decipher. It soon became apparent to Morgan that Lorton's journal was the best of all journals—more





detailed, more precise, beautiful language and some valuable accompanying illustrations. Morgan died in 1971 with the Lorton project only partially completed.

The "Troubadour" portion of the title means little. Lorton did play the violin and sing Negro spirituals along the trail. His real contribution to history is this journal. Now the Gold!

Leroy and Jean Johnson and their team from the Bancroft completed the Lorton project with their publication of the journal in April 2020. Their work is exquisite. Using high resolution cameras and GPS mapping that was not available to Dale Morgan, they present to us a treasure of golden observations of historic 1849 trail life.

Fred Rosenstock in the 1966 Denver Posse of *Westerners Brand Book*, in an article entitled "Small Miracles in my Life as a Book Hunter" says, "In my 43 years of hunting for... original historical manuscripts, diaries...I am able to report on a few instances that boarder on the miraculous." This find of William B. Lorton's Journal is the miraculous. We had to wait till 2020 to get it. Definitely, worth the wait!

– Dan Shamon

**George H. Holliday—On the Plains in '65. The 6th West Virginia Volunteer Cavalry in the West** edited by Glenn V. Longacre. Ohio University Press, Athens, OH, 2021. 220 pages, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover \$39.96

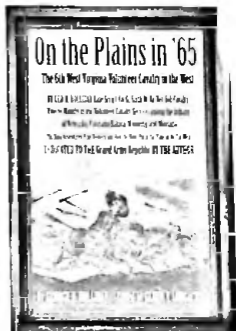
George Holliday begins this story, originally published in 1883, as a fifteen-year-old soldier in the Union Army, underage and eager to participate in the Civil War. Joining up in August 1863, he fought in several battles in the vicinity of West Virginia. In June 1865, the Regiment was ordered to move West, based on their having signed up for three-years service. Eighty-five men deserted, and more when they reached Fort Leavenworth. On July 15, there was a mutiny, but Holliday did not take part. They moved to Fort Sedgwick, and then to Fort Laramie. Soon they were engaged with many fights with the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe.

Along the way, he records many adventures. The crash of their train near Carlisle, II; the steamer on the Missouri that grounded on a sandbar; fight with Standing Elk's band; Powder River Expedition; playing poker with some Pawnee; a buffalo hunt in winter; a freezing cold winter with travel through high snow drifts; and many other tales that reflect the hardships and the adventures that these young men experienced.

They were in the West for only a year, and then returned to Wheeling, West Virginia to be mustered out with a great celebration in April 1866. Along the way, the 6<sup>th</sup> West Virginia Cavalry lost 301 killed in action, 214 died of wounds, and 233 discharged as unfit for further duty. A further 137 men died of disease, most of this during the Civil War. The two appendices are also most interesting. Holliday went on to become a Congressional Representative for Ohio in later life.

Longacre's editing and notes are generally exceptional, except for this comment regarding Sand Creek as being an "unprovoked massacre." This is a truly important and interesting account of life and experiences on the Great Plains in the mid 1860s. A very enjoyable read.

– Alan Culpin



**Framing First Contact—From Catlin to Russell** by Kate Elliott. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman OK, 2020. 162 pages, twenty artistic plates. Hardcover \$39.95

Some of our favorite American artists such as Weir, Caitlin, Bierstadt, Moran and Russell are under Elliott's microscope. Elliott's artistic interpretations add much to what the viewer first sees as she tells how the art was conceived, its intent and its place in the national story. The author describes competitions between artists to receive government commissions to decorate the national and state capitol buildings.

Elliott writes about conflict in the themes of art history. Early American art often showed European dominance and superiority over Native Americans. The author describes the positioning, expressions, clothing and intent of the artist in each painting to prove her point. J. Vanderlyn's *Landing of Columbus at the Island of Guanahani*, which is in the U.S. Capitol, is an example. Elliott writes a detailed history of Congressional art painted during the reconstruction era. During reconstruction, art was created to reconcile the past and move toward healing.



Art was to show reunification through acceptance. Differences were celebrated. Albert Bierstadt's *Discovery of the Hudson River* was painted as a healing statement to bring the North and South together. T. Moran's painting *Ponce de Leon in Florida* is interpreted as a painting showing cultures acceptances. A. Bierstadt vied with T. Moran over contracts for two panels. Both paintings are now behind the speaker's chair in the House of Representatives displaying their differing viewpoints.

As Manifest Destiny surged westward, progressive art was created to show improvements and modernity. The author writes a compelling account of the Montana Governor's decision about what art was acceptable based on location, violence, history and progress. Montana and Minnesota recorded local history by including art by Russell, Granville and Stuart in their state capitols. Edwin Blashfield painted *Minnesota. Granary of the World* showing progress and modernity. Artists of the West wanted to show images of Indians and changes to pioneer life. C. Russell's *Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole* represent this tendency. Elliott writes positively about C. Russell whose art places Indians at equals to the immigrants. For example, Russell's *I Savvy these Folks* (1907) shows Indian strength and friendship toward American immigrants.

Large artistic murals were to stimulate patriotism and memorialize achievement. Each plant, person and article was placed intentionally to represent something more. Elliott interprets these details for the reader. The author questions how citizens and legislators are willing to keep racist imagery when democratic institutions are meant to represent all people. "First Contact" paintings are what Elliott describes as contact, conversion and capitulation such as *The Surrender of Chief Joseph* by E. Paxson in the Montana State capitol. The author interprets famous American historical paintings as Euro-American dominance and cultural replacement, not co-existence. The book includes sixteen pages of twenty full-color plates. The book is a fun read.

- Frank Pilkington

**From Wounded Knee to the Gallows—The Life and Trials of Lakota Chief Two Sticks** by Philip S. Hall and Mary Solon Lewis. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman OK, 2020. 280 pages, illustrations, endnotes, bibliography, index. Softcover \$24.95.

The story of the last days of the Sioux nation at Wounded Knee is powerfully sad. While this book is not about Wounded Knee per se, it does account for one of the “roads” leading from Wounded Knee, and that is the hanging of Lakota Two Sticks in Deadwood on December 28, 1894, one day short of the fourth anniversary of the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890. As the book details, Indian turmoil lingered both before and after the 1890 massacre. Two Sticks’ hanging basically highlights this lingering turmoil.

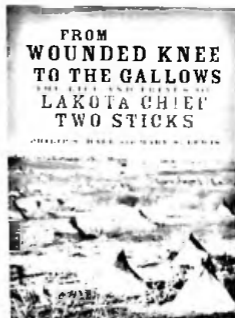
Violence on and near the Pine Ridge Reservation did not end with Wounded Knee, and the authors lay out well the important precipitous events after Wounded Knee and before the murders for which Two Sticks was found guilty of conspiring. From the authors’ understanding, the hanging of Two Sticks “was emblematic and also symptomatic of the government’s half century of dishonesty with the Lakota.” (p. 228) This is because a modern look at the complete evidence against Two Sticks reveals insufficiency for finding guilt. After reading the book, it is a compelling summation.

The reason for the trial and hanging had to do with the early February 1893 murder of four white cowboys, killed apparently while asleep in their dugout, at a camp on the Pine Ridge Reservation and where two of the cowboys were tending cattle to be sold to the agency as a part of Indian contractual annuities. Sadly, two teenage boys had spent the night at the cabin while they were checking on missing horses that they thought might be mixed in with Lakota stock on the reservation. They were offered dinner and a bed for the night. The boys had ventured more than twenty-five miles north from their respective homes in search of their missing horses.

The evidence at the crime scene showed tracks in the snow indicating four Indians committed the crime, and they came from a nearby Lakota village belonging to a chief named No Water. Soon it was learned the killers were under the leadership of Two Sticks. Investigations were hampered by bad weather as well as Indian resistance in surrendering the guilty parties, but eventually the wheels of justice moved forward. Many events, both inside and outside the reservation, slowed the search for justice, and the authors do a good job of explaining all of this.

The book ends with the hanging of Two Sticks and the press reaction about the event. A newspaper in Rapid City used the title “A Good Indian” to describe the hanging, showing the frontier belief carried for twenty-five years that the only good Indian was a dead Indian. Such racist views permeate the entire sequence of events leading to Two Sticks’ hanging.

This book helps the reader to better understand that the tragedy of Wounded Knee carried tentacles of injustice well beyond the massacre of December 29, 1890, a day that should never be forgotten in American history.



**A Most Splendid Company—The Coronado Expedition in Global Perspective** by Richard Flint and Shirley Cushing Flint. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, NM, 2019. 450 pages. index, maps, illustrations, bibliography. Hardcover \$95.00.

Do you wake up at night wondering about what you don't know about the 1539-to-1542 Coronado Expedition? This book will relieve your anxiety. It is 450 pages of details—the who, what, when, where and why of the Spanish exploration into what became the American Southwest. Thirty years after Columbus' sailings and twenty years after the Cortes' conquest of Mexico, the Spanish still hadn't found the answer as to how to get to China, India and the Spice Islands by traveling west. Sea travel was extremely dangerous, travel by land was preferable. The cosmology of the time reinforced the belief that the New World was part of Asia, so by riding or walking westward, one would eventually come to the rich civilizations that Marco Polo had visited 300 years earlier.

Richard and Shirley Flint delved into the minutia. Who organized the expedition? That was Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of Mexico. Who went on the expedition? The authors found that 389 Spanish Europeans subdivided into ranks, occupations, age, family connections, place of birth etc. Maybe there were 2000 Indian allies, maybe 300 Black or Moorish servants or slaves. A reader might want to know how many women, or priests or trumpeters. It is all here. Who paid for the expedition? That is here also.

The book shows diligent research and does not suffer at all from lack of detail. Consider that the authors spent two decades researching what provisions were taken on the expedition. That the expedition was undertaken to discover riches and to quickly convert new peoples to Christianity provides the reason for the undertaking. The dearth of riches and lack of converts was the measured result.

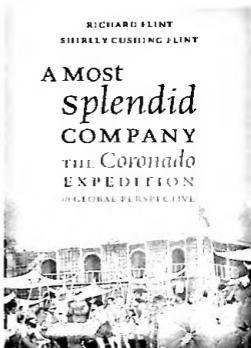
An editor more experienced in storytelling might have served the book's presentation well. The maps that show where the expedition members came from and where they were going do not appear until page 170. The consolidated timeline of the expedition comes shortly thereafter. This is information that the reader wants to know right away.

The book is a fascinating read that illuminates much about Spanish organizational skills and about Native American resistance to European encroachment. Above all, it is amazing historical research.

— Dan Shannon

**Last Sovereigns—Sitting Bull & the Resistance of the Free Lakotas** by Robert M. Utley. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln NE, 2020. 166 pages, photographs, endnotes, bibliography, index. Hardcover \$24.95.

Virtually all of the twenty-two incredibly diverse books Utley has written over the past fifty-eight years are considered among the best on their particular subjects. *The Lance and the Shield* (1993), a comprehensive biography of Sitting Bull, is no exception. As Utley



explains in this latest work, however, he sought to add details specifically related to Sitting Bull's expatriate experience in Canada from 1877 to 1881.

In bolting across the "Medicine Line" into the Grandmother's country, Sitting Bull and his followers ignited a complex web of diplomatic crises that Utley takes great pains to illuminate. The Canadian government had its hands full dealing with its own tribesmen. Sitting Bull's arrival threatened already scarce resources, forcing Ottawa to refuse to provide support for the Sioux. On the other hand, American troops under General Nelson Miles appeared only too eager to cross the international line to force Sitting Bull's return, actions the Canadians and the British could never countenance. An American military delegation eventually entered Canada to conduct negotiations with Sitting Bull that went nowhere.

Complicating the already tense situation was an intense friendship that developed between Major James Morrow Walsh of the recently activated Northwest Mounted Police and Sitting Bull. Walsh became quite literally the only white man Sitting Bull trusted. Walsh assured Sitting Bull that his people could remain in Canada, as long as they followed the ruler a policy utterly at odds with that of his government, a conflict that resulted in his removal.

Although the American military did everything in its power to entice Sitting Bull return to a reservation, it was ironically two Canadian civilians who did the most to accomplish the goal so ardently sought by all three governments. Edward Allison made several attempts to negotiate Sitting Bull's return, finally succeeding only to see an impulsive reaction by American soldiers send Sitting Bull scurrying back across the border. Jean Louis Legarde virtually bankrupted himself supplying food to Sitting Bull's starving people, but won Bull's trust and eventually convinced him to return.

Although Utley hails Sitting Bull as the greatest of American Indian chiefs, his portrayal shows a deeply troubled man who could at times be fearful, mercurial and vacillating.

I found the book to be fascinating in its detail and its insightful discussion of the issues involved. It brings to life an amazingly complex story that is very little known.

- Dennis Hagen

**A Horse's Tale** by Mark Twain. Edited and with introduction by Charles C. Bradshaw. Afterword by Shelley Fisher Fishkin. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 224 pages, photos, illustrations, index. Papercover \$19.95.

This is number six in the Papers of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody series and is the first fictional release in that run. There really is little about Buffalo Bill in the original work, but this edition adds quite a bit more Cody to the mix. The original work was published 1906 in *Harper's Monthly* (in two parts) then issued the following year in book form. We must answer two questions here. 1. Is the original book entertaining or historical enough to read? 2. Is this edition worth paying for? The answer to the first is "maybe" while the answer to the second is, "yes."



This was Twain's last published complete novella (he passed in 1910). He was always against animal cruelty, lauding the work of the SPCA and when actress Minnie Maddern Fiske asked Twain to write an anti-bullfighting piece, he dashed off this story (allegedly in two days). In the afterword, Fishkin states *A Horse's Tale* [is] largely neglected by critics because of its unabashed sentimentality." Indeed much of the book speaks to the sweetness of the little girl in the story—a girl patterned after his own daughter Susy who had died in 1896 (age 24).

The actual story takes up only eighty pages of this volume and is about a little girl who goes to live with her uncle (Gen. Alison) at the fictional Ft. Paxton on the frontier after her parents die. While there, she charms the post including Buffalo Bill who gives her his prized horse, Soldier Boy. Later she returns to her mom's ancestral country (Spain) where she and her horse meet misadventure. Twain chose to change the narrator of the story in each chapter including having the horse tell some of it which can make it a bit hard to follow.

If you want to own everything by Twain, that would be enough. However, this story feels like the *Cliff Notes* version of a much better novel. What makes this edition worth owning is the addition of extra material. They have included a 1904 short story *A Dog's Tale* in the same vein decrying vivisection. There are myriad letters to and from Twain as well as a section written by John Hay (personal secretary to Lincoln) about bullfighting.

Cody and Twain may have never met, however, Twain did attend Buffalo Bill's Wild West show on two occasions. Correspondences between the two are reproduced. In addition to photos of Cody, Twain and their families, the editors have done a nice job of adding useful notes to explain confusing parts. This is a worth addition to Twain's canon.

— George W. Krieger

**The Earps Invade Southern California—Bootlegging Los Angeles, Santa Monica and the Old Soldiers' Home** by Don Chaput and David D. DeHaas. University of North Texas Press, Denton, TX, 2020. 237 pages, photographs, maps, bibliography, index, end notes. Hardcover \$25.80

An old WWI friend of this reviewer always said that when he got old, he would go to the Old Soldiers' Home. Even when told it didn't work that way anymore, he insisted that it did, and that the Old Soldiers' Home was a wonderful place to be. This book agrees. The combined talents of Don Chaput and David DeHaas tell the story of the 1888 creation and running of the best of the Old Soldiers' Homes, the one in Sawtelle, California, a soon-to-be suburb of Los Angeles not far from the pleasant beaches of Santa Monica.

From out of the Wild West come the fortune-seeking Earp family. Father Nicholas, brothers Wyatt, Virgil, James, Warren (not Morgan whose days were finished in Tombstone's OK Corral) and sister Adelia, all make Sawtelle and the Soldiers' Home their base of retirement and profit making. The new Soldiers' Home had 3,000 to 4,500 veterans of the Mexican American War, the Civil War and the Spanish American War, each with a veterans' pension of \$6.00 to

## MARK TWAIN A HORSE'S TALE



Edited and illustrated introduction by CHARLES C. BRADSHAW

\$20.00 a month to spend. Spend on what? Most likely, they would spend it on booze, gambling, and women. The Earps, having considerable experience in all these areas, exploit the situation well.

This volume captures the excitement of the quickly developing Southern California scene from 1880 through 1920. The reader is introduced to the temperance leaders and to the ins-and-outs of bootlegging—the “blind pigs” known elsewhere as the speak-easy. Law enforcement focused on eradicating liquor, card games and fast women. The crafty old soldiers were equally inventive in obtaining all three.

The reader is supplied with helpful maps, diagrams and photographs of the rise and eventual decay of this grand home for veterans. In the heyday of the transcontinental railways and rapid growth of newspapers, the Sawtelle Home was always a pleasant travel destination and the source of countless human-interest stories. An appendix gives biographies of many of the fascinating fellows who lived there.

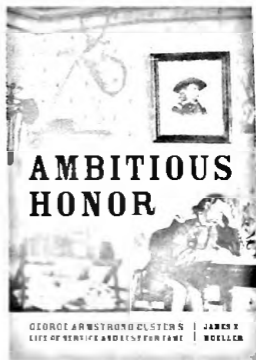
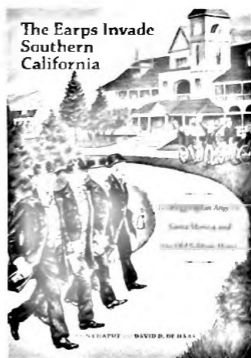
This is a delightful tale of an era easily overlooked. Join the celebrities, politicians and families from all over the U.S. coming to visit the old gentlemen and the fabulous Old Soldiers' Home near Santa Monica. Get your rail tickets; ride the Balloon Loop out to the home. Maybe you just might meet the Earps and their gun-toting buddies there. Watch your wallets. — Dan Shanno

**Ambitious Honor—George Armstrong Custer's Life of Service and Lust for Fame** by James E. Mueller. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, 2020. 324 pages. Hardcover \$26.00

When one thinks of Custer, one usually thinks of his “Last Stand” and death at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. They overlook that he became a hero during the Civil War, a published writer, and a successful Indian fighter. Mueller fills in all these details in this well-written book.

George Armstrong Custer was born in 1839 in a small town in Ohio, but when quite young he moved to live with his half-sister in Monroe, Michigan where he completed his education. As the title suggests, he was ambitious, so he attended Normal school, and looking for a higher education, he convinced his Congressman to appoint him to West Point.

His stay at the Point was less than impressive: he was a prankster. He did become a prodigious letter writer, to his friends, relatives and his future wife. The author references many of these to lend authenticity. Custer graduated in June 1861, as the bottom cadet in his class and was commissioned in the cavalry.



After a year in the Civil War, he became an aide to General George McClellan with a promotion to Captain. After McClellan's dismissal he became an aide to General Alfred Pleasonton who recognized Custer's courage and ability, and promoted him from Captain to Brigadier-General, at twenty-three, the youngest General in the army. At Gettysburg he led a charge against Jeb Stuart's Confederate Cavalry, causing them to flee.

In February 1864 he returned to Monroe to marry Elizabeth "Libbie" Bacon, whom he had pursued for some years. Theirs proved a happy marriage, though childless, and cut short.

He gained more renown during the Shenandoah Valley campaign and at the end of the war was involved in the Appomattox campaign, though he was not at the courthouse when Lee surrendered. However, Custer's superior, General Sheridan, purchased the table the surrender was signed on, and presented it to Libbie Custer saying "there is no one ...who contributed more to bring this about than your gallant husband."

The author gives a detailed description of Custer's last campaign in 1876. After learning of the position of a large Indian village he set out leading 225 of his troopers. Ordering his second in command, Major Marcus Reno with 140 troopers to "charge the Indian village," Custer approached the village from another direction. Reno did not expect the Indians to attack him, became indecisive, failed to charge and in fact retreated. Custer pressed on but found himself surrounded by Indians, and with no help from Reno or the rest of his command, he died with all his men on "Last Stand Hill." Although an insignificant battle, the author believes many people rank this disaster with Pearl Harbor or 9/11.

The book contains copious notes and a detailed bibliography. However, it would benefit from a few maps to illustrate some of Custer's campaigns. — Tom Morton

**Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art** by Christopher Patrello. Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO, 2020. 99 pages, maps, photographs, glossary, bibliography. Softcover \$10.95.

The Northwest Coast and Alaska Native galleries of the Denver Art Museum offer a beautiful and dynamic space where visitors can immerse themselves in one of the world's finest collection of works by Native master artists from the region. This colorful and informative companion guide to the collection contains color photos of representative objects in the collection, behind-the-scenes photos, maps to orient viewers and background information on the regions and artistic forms.

The DAM was one of the first major institutions to collect the arts of indigenous peoples. The encyclopedic collection, formed in 1925, contains works by indigenous peoples of North America, Africa, and Oceania. During the ensuing century it has grown to nearly 20,000 objects. The DAM's collecting criteria have been based on aesthetic quality. Works—from utilitarian ivory snow goggles to contemporary art glass—are acknowledged and





viewed as having been made by artists. These are not regarded as artifacts but as part of an ongoing artistic tradition. The collection contains works created by highly regarded fine artists working today as well as everyday objects made by unknown artisans.

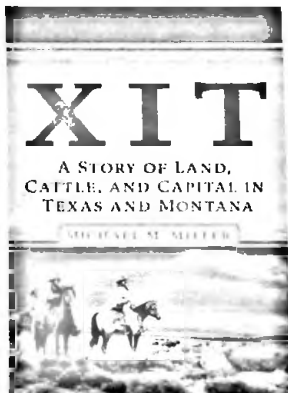
In this guide, the DAM uses culturally appropriate language and translations in its effort to honor the diverse cultures and dialects of the people and places described. The guide contains a helpful glossary of terms and the cultural politics of language used in discussing Native arts so readers may understand how and why the museum made its language choices. Native artists also contribute essays, first-person reflections on their work, its cultural context and their creative processes.

Readers of this slim volume are sure to enjoy this virtual look at a small sliver of the DAM's collection as they learn about the artists and peoples behind these works.

Northwest Coast and Alaska Native Art is thoughtfully dedicated to the late Nancy Blomberg, the curator who led the Native Arts Department from 1990 to 2018. She was well respected in the Native community and furthered the DAM's mission as a center for the study and appreciation of indigenous arts. I had the privilege of walking through the galleries with Nancy several years ago. Our conversation opened my eyes and enhanced my appreciation of the sheer artistry of these artists, most of whom remain unknown to us. — Kimberly Field

**XIT—A Story of Land, Cattle, and Capital in Texas and Montana** by Michael M. Miller. Norman Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press. 2020. 268 pages, footnotes, bibliography: index. Hardcover \$24.95.

Author and native Texan history professor Michael Miller's writing is high-quality research and interesting storytelling. His chronology is easy to follow and fascinating to read, accompanied by maps and pictures. Texas had a lot of undeveloped land in 1885. Three million acres were offered to investors from Chicago in exchange for their agreement to build the Texas state capitol in Austin. Miller writes in detail about the financing and politics involved in the construction of the stately red granite capitol completed in 1888. The Chicago investors hoped to sell their Texas real estate to homesteaders, but soon realized the expanse and remote location had to be used for something more fitting to the geography and 19th century development. Miller's book examines the business side of cattle ranching to explain the risk to big money entrepreneurs who had to adapt or fail. The XIT ranch encompassed 90% of the Texas panhandle, which made it one of the largest ranches ever in America. Ranching began there in 1885 and lasted about thirty years. For ease of management, nine separate ranching headquarters were located in Texas near water, railroads and the best pasture lands. XIT management purchased a large tract of Montana



grassland along the Missouri River where two other satellite headquarters also operated. The Montana locations were used to fatten beef for northern markets.

Raising cattle was a complicated process for businessmen from Chicago. There were many obstacles to successful ranching including overgrazing, fencing wars, cattle highways, breed competition, the crowded industry, Indian boundaries, diseases and weather. The author describes all of these in detail. We all have seen a few old Western movies about cattle drives, and they are probably accurate at some level. The romanticism of the independent cowboys driving their herds across the Great Plains has a deeper story behind it. Miller's book takes the cattle industry of Western American history through the complex level of finance, political maneuvering, management, and international investments. The XIT ranch became a huge business that shaped the development for the locations of railroads, towns, homestead settlements, farms, land uses and cattle up-breeding.

The XIT ranching operation wound down in 1912 and was finished by 1915. Land values increased, the open range was fenced in, and the economy provided an opportunity for the investors who worked hard to keep the ranch afloat to get out. Ranching had a big economic, social and political influence on the American West, and the XIT was the biggest player in that story. Miller's book about the XIT ranch is the definitive historical account of this legendary enterprise. His book will become required reading for all students and lovers of Americas Western history.

— Frank Pilkington

**The Frontiersmen Who Couldn't Shoot Straight—The Army vs. the Pioneers 1815–1845** by Gregory Michno. Caxton Press, Caldwell, ID, 2020. 368 pages, photographs, footnotes, index. Hardcover \$18.95

Couldn't Shoot Straight? Not a lot of data on that. But author Michno provides anecdotal incidents in which the frontiersmen of the 1815 to 1845 period were uncouth, lawless brawlers who did not respect Indians, Blacks, foreigners, nor their own U.S. military. They were undisciplined and made sham soldiers when organized into militia units.

Debunking the American Exceptionalism myth, historian Gregory Michno drags the reader through the vile and lawless conduct of the American backwoodsmen. The period he writes about, between the end of the War of 1812 and the beginning of the Mexican-American War stands in the minds of most as a period where strong yeoman farmers and patriotic frontiersmen secured the blessings of liberty by turning the wilderness into civilization. Michno disagrees.

The author characterizes the frontiersmen as "white trash," a term first used in print in 1821. He shows them to be land hungry, aggressive, uneducated, unchurched, untrustworthy brawlers who had an unearned high opinion of themselves, both as individuals and as militia soldiers. Often, they squat on Indian or public lands refusing to do right by the lawful



owners. They illegally make and sell alcohol to Indians so that in drunkenness they can steal the Natives' land, timber, animals, slaves and possessions. They are cowards in the face of battle with well-armed resentful Indians.

The crux of the story is that the new U.S. Federal government was charged under its treaty powers to safeguard and preserve the native Indian tribes. The U.S. Army was the instrument through which the preservation of the tribes was to be accomplished. The squatter settlers would have none of it. To them, all land was available for settling. They stole the land or took the timber on the land and when greater force was needed to accomplish that task, they organized militias. They petitioned every level of state or territorial government to protect their seizures. In practice, state and local courts favored the settlers and would not uphold Indian claims. The tribes were dispossessed and forced to move west.

The author maintains that the military forts established on the frontier up until the 1840s were for the protection of the Indians not the settlers. We are told about the deprivations of Georgians against the tribes of northern Florida during three Seminole wars. When the Army seized illegally-cut timber or drove off settlers, the ruffians sued in local courts to have Indian property returned to the settlers. Juries and judges were happy to oblige. Military officers were often sued in the same courts for damages caused by the seizures. The federal government was not organized to defend its own military. The settlers won by default.

The vile behavior of the settlers extended to their relations with the Black enslaved population. Almost unreadably violent behavior characterized this pre-Civil War terrorism inflicted on the Blacks.

Interesting chapters on the so-called "Hunter's Patriot War" (1821 to 1838) i.e., armed pillaging raids into Canada, emphasizes that the frontier American is no one you would want for your neighbor. Testimony from European visitors to the American outback further documents the depravity of our ancestor pioneers. How this anarchist/terrorist became ennobled in our current view of our past is the subject of the final chapters of this book. Michno speculates that these anti-education, anti-social, sometimes violent ancestors never really went away. Their legacy is alive in today's politics.

This is a good read but not uplifting in any respect.

— Dan Shannon

**The Denver Posse of Westerners 75th Anniversary Brand Book 2020, Volume XXXV** by Denver Posse Members. Published by The Denver Posse of Westerners, 2020. 278 pages, photos, paintings, bibliography, endnotes, index. Hardcover \$55 including postage, available only through Rick Barth, 4646 County Road 72, Bailey, CO 80421.

The Denver Posse of Westerners is one of Colorado's longest-running groups. Founded in 1945, the Westerners published a *Brand Book* annually and then irregularly. This year's marks the 75th anniversary of the group of Western history buffs.

They have produced a handsomely bound volume complete with some photographs never before published. Original art by prominent Denver artist (and former Sheriff Reed Weimer) is included. The fifteen chapters are written by fifteen different authors so the writing is uneven—some simply family histories, others genealogy-related but many are well researched and professionally composed. Because there are fifteen articles, to discuss them all would produce a book review almost as large as the *75th Anniversary Brand Book 2020*. Here are a few, randomly chosen, highlights:

*Counting Coup: The Nature of Intertribal Warfare on the Great Plains Considered*  
by Dennis E. Hagen

Despite the oft-repeated claim that the many tribes of Native Americans on the Plains lived in bucolic harmony before an onrushing wave of settlers and the railroad, warfare was not unheard of. Battles erupted over territory, water, hunting grounds, and just-plain-revenge; Cheyenne and Sioux raided each other's camps, killing and kidnapping women and children. Sioux, Crow, Blackfeet, Kiowa, Osage and others were in frequent combat. In 1873, for example, Pawnee and Sioux tangled at what became known as Massacre Canyon in southwestern Nebraska where an estimated 156 Pawnee were killed. Dennis Hagen carefully backs up tales of bloody intertribal battles, citing eyewitnesses and previous historical accounts.

*The Colorado Women of the Ku Klux Klan*  
by Betty Jo Brenner

The life and influence of the Ku Klux Klan in mid-1920s is one of the darker episodes in Colorado history. Largely overlooked, however, was the role played by women in the KKK, about 11,000 of who were members spread over thirty-five chapters throughout the state. Their commander was Laurena Senter, who kept meticulous records of her time in the hooded empire. Betty Jo Brenner has made extensive use of Senter's records housed at the Denver Public Library. She provides rare insight into the group's rules, regulations and allegedly charitable works. Their emphasis was on "100 percent womanhood" as self-appointed gatekeepers for morality.

Even the devoted Senter eventually grew tired of the Klan. She wrote in her diary, "The order was one of sorrow, and haired, with ideals of beauty but too far above the selfish horde that flocked to its portals, hoping for personal gain and glory."

*Coornap: The Investigation into the 1960 Murder of Adolph Coors III*  
by Dennis L Potter

Dennis Potter's meticulous re-telling of the kidnap murder of Coors heir Adolph Coors III in 1960 reads like a true-crime magazine. Potter, a one-time captain in the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, enjoyed extraordinary access to police and court records. The result is an almost day-by-day telling of Coors' murder and the relentless police work that tracked down the murderer, Joseph Corbett Jr., in Canada. Potter also tells of the intense infighting among law enforcement that squabbled over evidence, media announcements, and credit for the arrest.

Other chapters in the book include looks at Mormon colonies in southern Colorado by Dana EchoHawk, tourist railroads by Keith Fessenden, Cody, Custer and the Grand Duke Alexis by Douglas Scott and Stephen Damm and the demise of grizzlies by Dan Martel.

– Dick Kreck

Editor's note: Dick Kreck was an editor and columnist at *The Denver Post* for thirty-eight years until his retirement in 2008. He has written several books on Colorado history, including *The Boy Murderer: Smaldone: An American Crime Family*; *Hell on Wheels*; and *Murder at the Brown Palace*. The latter two were #1 best sellers in Colorado.

