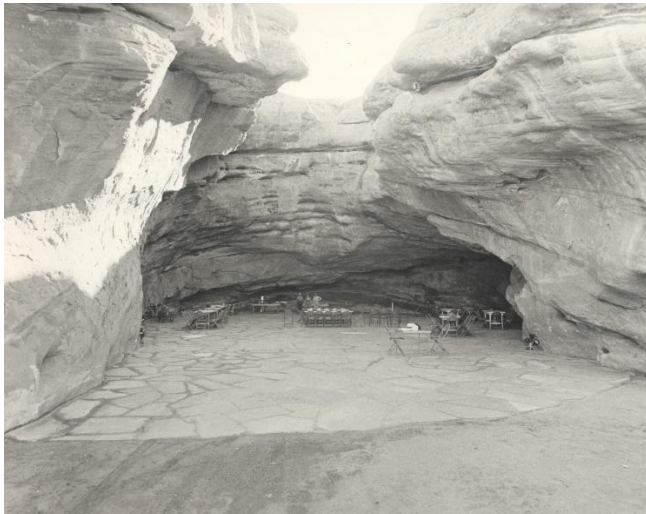


## First National Westerners Rendezvous And Colorow Cave

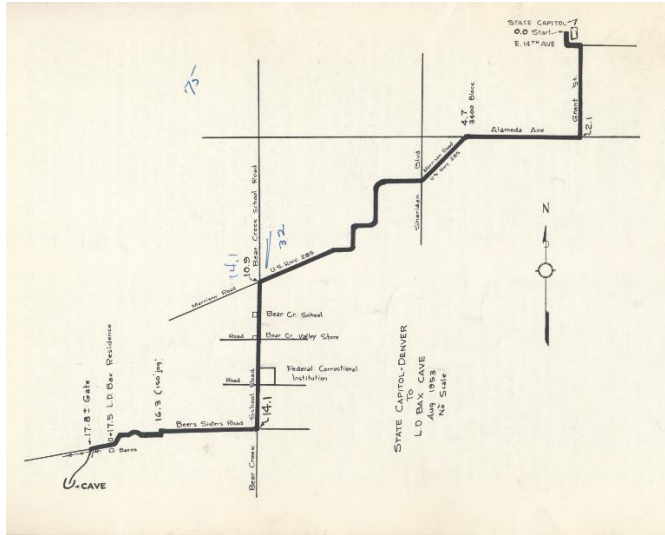
With the formation of the Westerners in Chicago in 1944, and Denver Posse following in 1945, it fell to Denver to host the first all-coral Westerners Rendezvous. The Denver Posse, seeing that ten years of experimentation with the idea that had been born around Chicago had passed, ventured to call a meeting in Denver of representatives of the several posses, corrals and groups of Westerners. A date was set, Saturday, July 31, 1954, and a place was selected, the historic site, Colorow's Cave, which was located on the ranch of Westerners corresponding member L. D. Bax.



[Co1] Colorow's Cave was about eighteen miles southwest of Denver, west of the almost vertical limestone hogbacks near Morrison, in a valley of softer rocks before the real mountains of igneous rocks, a gap in the Dakota sandstone of which Red Rocks and the Garden of the Gods are a part. Here in the red sandstone and clay weathering produced a cavern facing east. It is more of a natural corral than a shelter cave, with an entrance of a width of fifty to seventy-five feet and a height of eighty feet to the overhang opening.

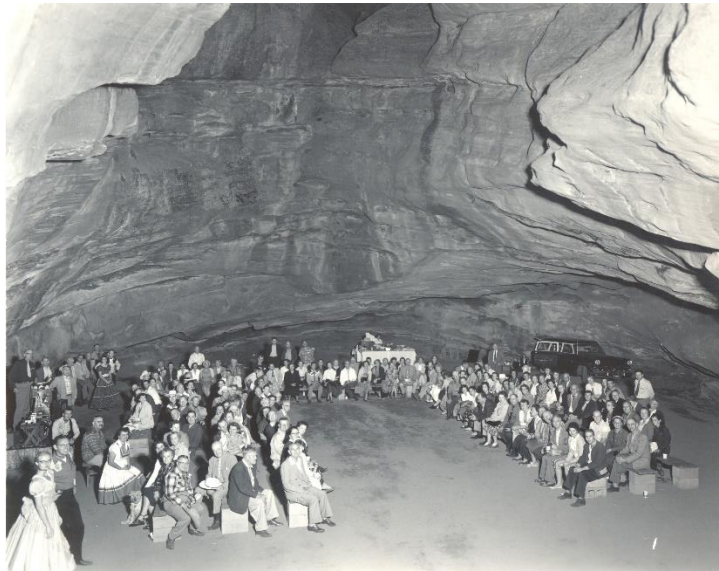
The property was once known as the Willow Springs Ranch, when it was used as a corral for 2,000 sheep. Later a rancher saved a large herd of cattle from freezing by driving them into the cave during a violent winter storm. William Byers, founder of the *Rocky Mountain News*, attended a concert in the cave in 1860. He called it "Mother Nature's Hall." In the 1870s it was simply called Indian Cave. During the 1920s and through the 1950s it was known as the Bax Ranch Cave. The name of Colorow was given later.

Reservations for the Rendezvous were sought, just send in your \$1.25, and all the other Westerners groups were invited.



[Co2]

Detailed directions for the Westerners were published in the *Roundup*. About 150 were in attendance.



[Co3]

Those present included Peter Decker of the New York Posse, several from California including Arthur H. Clark, from Laramie including Dean Krakel, Leland Case from Tucson, plus others from Washington, D. C., South Dakota, and Chicago. The most vivid attendee was bearded Art Woodward, director of the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, in trapper's buckskins, with possible bag and Kentucky rifle, with which he provided a pungent black-powder demonstration.

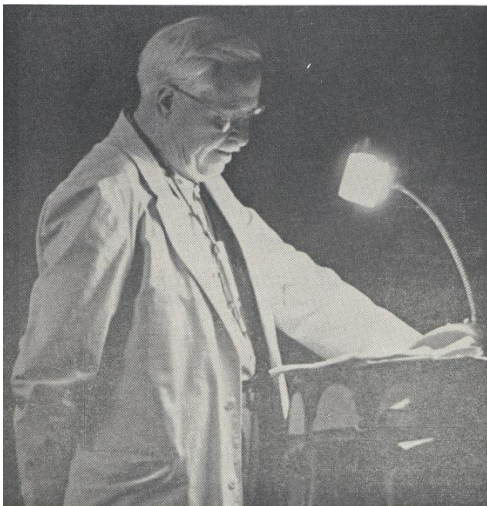


Photo: Fred M. Mazzula of Denver  
Art Woodward (right) and the late J. Frank Dobie in a historic picture taken at Colorow Cave near Denver during 1954 National Rendezvous. . . . Wnr. Dobie was "Chief Exalted Coyote" of the Tucson Corral "with the right to howl whenever in town."

[Co4]

The speaker for the evening, hailing from Austin, Texas, was renowned Western author J. Frank Dobie. He strived to convince the audience that he was seriously searching for anything new on Charles M. Russell.

Following this success, the second Rendezvous at Colorow Cave took place on August 11, 1956. Stanley Vestal spoke about Dodge City. About 220 Westerners and friends attended, drawing Possemen from Chicago, Los Angeles, and Wyoming. Among the attendees was Merrill Mattes of the National Park Service. The meal was catered by Hummel of Denver. The University of Denver Dudes and Dames entertained with dances.



STANLEY VESTAL, August 11, 1956  
Fred Mazzula Photo

[Co5]

As the main event, Stanley Vestal spoke about Dodge City (see "Dodge City Stories" in the August 1956 issue of the *Roundup*).

Annual Rendezvous continued through 1962. The posse met in August 1957, but details are lacking. In August 1958 several out-of-state Westerners were in attendance. On August 22, 1959, ninety-eight enjoyed a dinner with program by posse member Pete Smythe, with Western singers and a fine color movie of the Durango-Silverton Railroad.

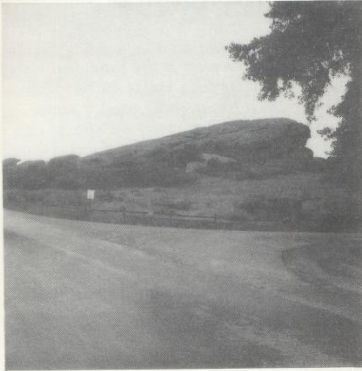


LEROY R. HAFEN  
Sheriff for 1954 of the Denver Posse

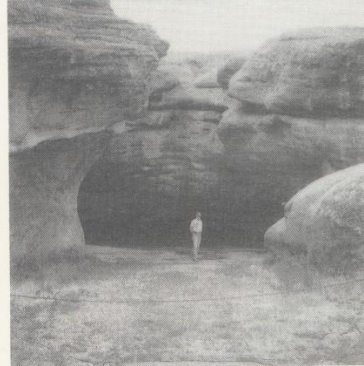
[Co6]

The 1960 Rendezvous featured a program "Fremont vs. the San Juan," by Dr. LeRoy Hafen, a Denver Posse charter member, the 1964 sheriff, and the Colorado State Historian from 1924 to 1954. Among the over-100 members and guests were several out-of-state Westerners. On August 19, 1961, Frederick Manfred spoke on "Backgrounds for Western Writing." On August 25, 1962, the gathering in Colorow Cave heard Evan Edwards, public relations man for Colorado's new Mental Health Center at Fort Logan, on "The Historical Background of Fort Logan." But there had been a change in 1962. Drew Bax had sold his ranch to Westerners corresponding member Ray Near. Ray had graciously allowed the Rendezvous for that one last year. The floor of the cave was lowered and flagstone laid. It is now the community center of Willow Brook.

But the story doesn't end there. In 1988, a posse member who lived in Willow Brook providing access, the Denver Posse again held a Rendezvous at Colorow Cave.



To reach Colorow Cave from Denver, drive west on West Belleview Avenue, about 4 miles west of Kipling Street, through the hogback. It's the first community to the south, and a sign there reads Willow Brook. If you pass the fire house on the north side you've gone too far! At Willow Brook enter the



area, bear to the right, and keep going about a half mile.

The cave itself is in a large, isolated sandstone block just off Colorow Drive, just beyond the corner of Colorow Drive and Cedarbrook Drive. Park along the road in front.

[Co7]

Deputy Sheriff Dr. Tom Noel was in charge of the arrangements and the evening's presentation featured posse member Richard Conn, the curator of native arts at the Denver Art Museum, with "Ute Indians in Colorado." And that does end the story of Westerners Rendezvous in Colorow Cave.

Illustrations:

Co1. Colorow Cave

Co2. Directions to Colorow Cave as printed in the *Roundup*

Co3. Rendezvous in Colorow Cave, July 31, 1954

Co4. Rendezvous speaker J. Frank Dobie and Los Angeles Corral member Art Wood, in buckskins

Co5. Stanley Vestal, speaker at the 1956 Rendezvous

Co6. Rendezvous speaker, Dr. Leroy Hafen, 1960

Co7. Photos of, and directions to, Colorow Cave, 1988 Rendezvous, the *Westerners Roundup*