



Figure 1: A 20 hp Model T Ford gets a “one horsepower” tow out of a stream in this circa 1917 photo by acclaimed Western artist Maynard Dixon. The homemade pickup was created by removing its body and fenders, then grafting on a wooden wagon box and bench seat. Note the chains on the rear wheel. The carbide headlamps, early-style radiator, and flat wooden dashboard date this vehicle between 1908 and 1915. Photo courtesy of Brian D. Dillon, from Richard H. Dillon’s Maynard Dixon collection, originally from special collections, Arizona State Library.

Detroit Iron Tales From the Los Angeles Westerners

Edited by John Dillon

Perhaps no 20th-century invention was more consequential for Americans than the car. It transformed the way we work, where we live, how we vacation, city layouts, economic supply chains, and even youth “courtship.” The Midwest may have built the cars, but Southern California

pioneered many automotive lifestyle changes, and remains the heart and soul of American car culture today. Fittingly, nine Westerners of the LA Corral share tales of work and pleasure with historical *Detroit Iron* in this *Branding Iron* special issue.

(Continued on Page 3)

The Branding Iron

Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners
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The Branding Iron is always seeking articles of up to around 20 pages dealing with every phase of the history of the Old West and California. Contributions from both members and friends are always welcome.
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Editor's Corner . . .

Do you like cars? Has the COVID-19 pandemic given you cabin fever? Do you wish you were out driving somewhere *instead* of social distancing at home? Then we have the *Branding Iron* for you! This Summer 2020 special issue is all about *Detroit Iron*—the classics, the clunkers, and the memories made in them.

So, buckle up and vacation vicariously in this virtual road trip through American automotive history. Enjoy the following articles and poems by Carla Laureen Bollinger, Brian D. Dillon, David Fries, Alan Heller, Abraham Hoffman, Ken Mallory, Jim Olds, Terry

Terrell, and Gary Turner. Articles are presented in sequence of the year of manufacture of each vehicle “starring” therein.

There are no Roundup summaries, due to the unfortunate lack of Roundups this past “Coronavirus” season. But if you are looking for extra reading material, don’t forget to check out a book review by Joe Cavallo.

Many thanks to our great contributors who make the *Branding Iron* possible. If you wish to contribute, feel free to get in touch.

Happy Trails!

John Dillon
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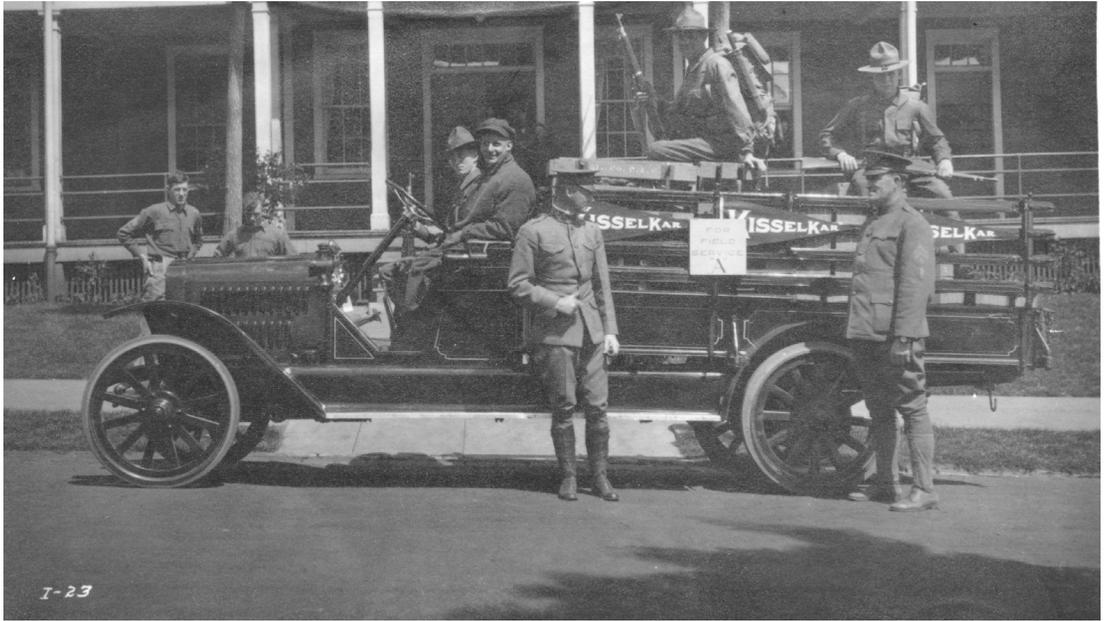


Figure 2: John "Branding Iron" Dillon's great-grandfather, First Sergeant William T. Dillon (1869-1938) of the 61st Coast Artillery Company, Fort Baker, Marin County, California, standing at right, with some of his enlisted men and an unidentified officer. The soldiers pose with a 1913 Kissel Kar long-wheelbase open "delivery wagon" adapted for military use as an experimental "troop hauler" with bench seats in its cargo bed. This vehicle, parked at Fort Baker, was being tested in one of the earliest motorization evaluations by the U.S. Army. The civilian in the driver's seat was probably the Kissel Kar representative from San Francisco. The white sheet of paper pinned to the stake-side reads "For Field Service [Grade] "A." Dillon family photo.

The 1913 Kissel Kar: An Experimental Military Vehicle

Brian Dervin Dillon

The earliest use of motor vehicles by the U.S. Military took place during the post-earthquake fires in San Francisco during April 18-21, 1906. Private automobiles were commandeered by officers and non-coms from the Presidio and the Marin Forts for use by the Dynamite Squads blowing up portions of the city as fire-fighting measures. My grandfather Sergeant W. T. Dillon led one such Dynamite Squad six years before the Kissel Kar photograph above was taken.

The first Kissel automobile was built in 1905 by two brothers, George and Will Kissel, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. By 1909 Kissel Kars could be ordered with short or long wheelbases, and "light" (small, 30 or 40 hp) or large (50 hp, 380 CID) 4-cylinder or even larger 60 hp six cylinder engines. By comparison, Henry Ford's contemporary

Model T (Figure 1, cover) only boasted 20 hp. The Kissel brothers dropped the Teutonic "Kar" element from their company name in response to anti-German sentiment in 1917.

Kissel also built trucks rated at $\frac{3}{4}$, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 tons. Their largest trucks were open-cab, chain drive, flatbed affairs, much taller than their passenger vehicles. Kissel supplied the American Army with trucks during WWI, and as early as 1915 was selling military vehicles abroad (to the Kingdom of Serbia, for example). Their most successful model, the Kissel Gold Bug Speedster, was a fast, bright yellow sports car that popularized the make and sold well beginning in 1923. The company made cars and trucks through the 1920s, but was killed by the Great Depression, and ceased production in 1930.



Figure 3: Author and adventurer Ken Mallory (center) with his 1930 Model A Cabriolet Coupe and fellow adventurers Norma and Dick Canzoneri (right) with their 1930 Model A Tudor Sedan that they drove over the Alps and through Europe in 2001. Photo courtesy of Jim Macklin.

Driving a Herd of Model A's Over the Swiss Alps

Ken Mallory

This tale challenges the tale Mark Twain told in *A Tramp Abroad* about his pedestrian tour of Europe in 1878. In this case, in September 2001, a clutch (Pardon the expression!) of Americans, many from Southern California, shipped their vintage Model A Fords to Europe, drove them on a breathtaking thirty-day tour of Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Italy, including two sorties over the Alps, and lived to tell about it! I drove Number 41 of those 50 historic automobiles, my yellow Cabriolet coupe, in that adventure with my wife Betty. In this article, I will describe how we happened to hatch this adventure, how we made it happen, and how it turned out.

How we hatched the adventure:

There are thousands of vintage car owners across America in addition to even more hot rod and other auto enthusiasts. I am involved with a San Gabriel Valley club called the Santa Anita A's, which has over a hundred families and individuals as members. It is associated with a national organization called the Model A Ford Club of America, which has more than 280 affiliated clubs around the country and is the largest club related to a single model/make of automobiles. In Southern California in 2000, the Model A Touring Club was formed as a Special Interest Group of the national organization. The tour of Europe in 2001 was the first trip



Figure 4: License plate honoring Ken Mallory's position (41) in the line of tour. Photo courtesy of Jim Macklin.

organized under the auspices of the club.

The Santa Anita A's are deeply involved in local communities through their car shows and events and through participation in small town patriotic parades and other community events. You've probably seen some of our members' classy classic cars in annual local parades, sometimes carrying dignitaries and/or beautiful girls.

A member named Lee Chase was the inspiration behind the creation of the touring Special Interest Group and the trip to Europe. Lee and several other Southern California Model A owners had planned and executed two less ambitious tours in 1998 and 1999. Then in 2000, they formed the touring organization and planned the European tour. We were blessed to have individuals with the experience of organizing and leading tours like this, including one who was a native German speaker with extensive knowledge of European culture, laws, and regulations.

How we made it happen:

Obviously, an expedition like this requires great attention to details and logistics.

Who's on board?

The first necessary step was determining who and how many people and how

many vehicles would be participating. This is something that the Model A Ford Club of America has done for years on a domestic basis. Groups of people from local Model A clubs enjoy traveling together. Eight couples from our local Santa Anita A's club decided well in advance to travel together on this tour. Most of the people associated with the fifty-car expedition came from the West Coast.

Will they let us on their roads?

Second, the legal and operational status of the classic automobiles had to be thorough and accurate. The European authorities wouldn't want unsafe cars operating on their *strasses*, *strade* and *rues*. We never intended to drive the famous *autobahns* because our old cars could not maintain the high speeds required. In restoring these aged vehicles, lots of replacement parts are installed, including major elements like engines and transmissions. Consequently, in some cases, the Vehicle Identification Number on the engine no longer agreed with the numbers on the registration. The club arranged for the California Highway Patrol to rivet new identification numbers on the driver's door post of nonconforming vehicles so that all ownership numbers would not be questioned by the European authorities. The members also worked together to make sure the cars were

in top operating condition. This helped reduce the anxiety resulting from driving old cars in a foreign environment as well as satisfying the European authorities.

What if a Model A needs repair?

Since these cars, which were over seventy years old at the time, are known to need repairs on occasion, and Model A Ford parts might not be readily available in Europe, the participating owners estimated how many tires, clutches, generators, water pumps and other spare parts might be needed.

Then they acquired an appropriate community inventory of parts and the tools with which to make repairs. This inventory was then broken down into boxes of material to be carried by individual owners. Then, if needed, the drivers knew on whom to call when they needed parts from the inventory. Having developed good relationships over the years, any driver in need would be well taken care of by the other drivers, some of whom were also excellent auto mechanics.

How did we get fifty Model A Fords to Europe?

To get the cars to Europe is a story in itself. The answer to this question is that the cars were shipped to Antwerp in the Netherlands in marine containers and then the containers were taken up the Rhine River on a barge to Basel, Switzerland. The owners dropped off their cars at the docks in Long Beach, California on July 16th, seven weeks before the tour was to start. Almost all the fuel was drained from the fuel tank and other steps taken to secure the cars during the voyage through the Panama Canal and across the Atlantic Ocean with the possibility of heavy seas. Obviously, the fuel tanks could not be full for fear of gasoline spilling out; however, there had to be enough gas for the port workers in Basel to drive the cars off the dock to a garage.

On the Model A car, the fuel tank is mounted behind the hood. Fuel flow to the engine is by gravity, and all Fords from the early years had no fuel pumps. The gas cap and fuel port are in the middle of the hood

just in front of and just below the windshield. In spite of leaving only a minimal amount of gas in the tank, by the time my car got back to Long Beach in November, 2001, enough fuel had splashed out of the gas cap to corrode away some of the surrounding yellow paint. I wondered what kind of sea passage would have caused that much spillage.

It turned out that three Model A's were just long enough to securely fill one marine container. The cars were fastened to the wood floor of the containers. Some of the spare parts and tools and trunks were secured inside the cars, so they would not have to be shipped separately. But they did have to be secured, so they could not come loose during the voyage and damage the cars. The cars were shipped mostly from Long Beach but also from New York and Houston. The cost of shipping each container was about \$7,000, but since each container held three cars for trips to and from Europe, the cost of about \$2,300 for each car was not overly expensive.

We all flew into nearby Zürich and made our way over to Basel. By the time we arrived in Basel on September 10th, 2001, to pick up our cars, they were already unpacked from the containers and sitting in rows in a garage there. All we had to do was line up at a service station in Basel to fill the tanks. The gas cost the equivalent of about \$4.50 per gallon back then—astonishing to us but normal in Europe. One driver made the mistake of filling his tank with diesel fuel instead of gasoline. His tank had to be drained and then refilled with the correct fuel. Due to the different design of the fuel pumps compared to the ones in America, one can see how this mistake might be made. He didn't make it again.

Seeing fifty Model A Fords in lines at the pumps was a really unique sight for the residents of Basel! We knew that touring as a single group with fifty autos was too cumbersome. We ended up breaking down into smaller related groups who followed a general plan but managed their own choices regarding where to stop for fuel, have lunch, etc. The only time the entire group got together at the same time was at the hotels where reservations had been made. All the folks on the tour were supplied with walkie-talkies so



Figure 5 (Left): Dick Canzoneri fueling up “Sweetpea,” his thirsty Model A, after a long voyage. Ken Mallory’s yellow Model A is next in line. **Figure 6 (Right):** Display in a German store showing sympathy for the attacks in the US on September 11th. “Opfern” is German for “victims.” Both photos by Ken Mallory.

we could keep in touch. My wife Betty and I traveled with a group of eight vehicles mostly from our local Model A club.

The tour begins!

After picking up the cars in Basel and refueling them, we began our tour with a drive across the Rhine River into Germany. Our destination was a small town called Rickenbach at the southern end of the *Schwarzwald*, or Black Forest, district in the state of Baden-Württemberg.

We were pleased to have a flatbed tow truck driven by members of the Ford Motor Club of Switzerland to deal with any repair problems. In one incident, the spring perch—which attaches the body to the spring assembly on each wheel—broke on one wheel of a car. Since the car could not move without this piece, the accommodating Swiss truck drivers carted the broken car off to a Swiss club member’s location. By the next morning, the car was returned with the broken spring assembly fixed, and the car had been completely serviced courtesy of the Ford Motor Club of Switzerland members. This is typical of how club members treat each other no matter where on earth they live or are visiting. Luckily, other than this repair, the only repair necessary on the trip within our small group was fixing one flat tire! On the other hand, in the whole group, there were several serious malfunctions that required heroic repair efforts by those who sacrificed their

sleep to keep everyone on the road.

On the first full day in Europe, the next day, we drove north through the picturesque *Schwarzwald* to Schonach. There we visited a cuckoo clock factory where most of us bought genuine Black Forest hand-crafted cuckoo clocks. We also stopped in an enclosed plaza in a beautiful small town to eat lunch at an Italian restaurant called *Ristorante Centrale*. Our line of eight Model A cars immediately attracted the attention of the local folks, including the owner/chef and the staff at the restaurant. We found this happened virtually everywhere we stopped all during the trip.

A notable, tragic day:

In the afternoon, as we were driving through the Black Forest enjoying the scenery, something extraordinary happened. It was September 11, 2001, and we were five hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time in America. Our friend who originally came from Germany was riding in the tow truck, which had a radio. He heard on the news that two planes had flown into the World Trade Center in New York, the towers had collapsed, and another plane had flown into the Pentagon. Immediately the news flew around the cars on the tour via the walkie-talkies. We drove to our next hotel to watch the news on television. The hotel staff found an English language channel for us. One of our group, who was a minister, held a spontaneous religious service at the hotel. This gave us some

relief from the shock we all felt. We stayed up late watching for any new developments.

The Swiss and German people around us were as shocked and disturbed as we were. On later days during the tour, we saw signs up expressing sadness and sympathy for the loss of lives in those events. An example is in Figure 6, similar to many others we saw in windows of homes, shops and other places.

Although the tragedy of these events will forever stay with us, it's interesting to note how fortunate we were to arrive in Europe just the day before all flights in America and elsewhere were cancelled due to uncertainty in the immediate aftermath.

Our itinerary:

Since this is an article about cars and not a travelogue through Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Italy, I'll provide you with a general itinerary of the circuitous route we drove through those countries. I will, however, describe some of our adventures with these old Model A Fords. Let me just say that this route is full of history and has just flat-out spectacular scenery!

Our route included the following places:

1. We started in Basel on the Rhine River in Switzerland.
2. We entered Germany through the *Schwarzwald* in Baden-Württemberg and then through the neighboring state of Bavaria ending up in the Austrian city of Bregenz at the south end of Lake Constance.
3. From Bregenz, we drove to a small picturesque German village, Oberammergau, that is known for putting on, every ten years for the last 380 years, a Passion Play on the life of Jesus. It was started in 1632, the year after the bubonic plague killed most of the people in the village. The survivors committed to God to put on the play every ten years if He protected the people. No one from the village has died from the plague since then. So, the play continues today. Pilgrims travel from all over the world to attend it. Ironically, in 2020, the pageant has been cancelled in the name of COVID-19 and social dis-

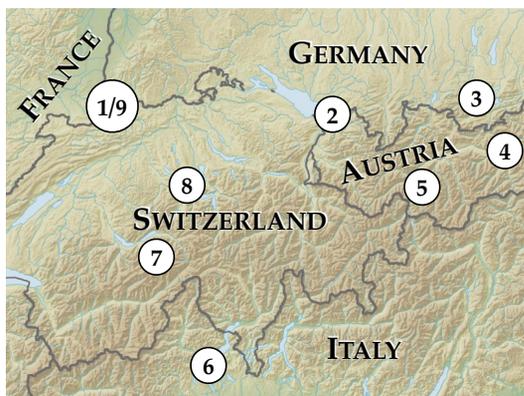


Figure 7: A map of the Model A Touring Club's Alpine invasion. Destinations visited by the Model A's were: (1) Basel, (2) Bregenz, (3) Oberammergau, (4) Innsbruck, (5) Fiss/Ladis, (6) Stresa, (7) Grindelwald, (8) Lucerne, (9) and Basel again. Trips to the airport at Zürich (without the Model A's) are not shown. Public domain internet map, edited by John Dillon.

- tancing, challenging the promise made almost 400 years ago. We also visited the nearby Linderhof, the summer palace of Mad King Ludwig II of Bavaria, known for building magnificent but bank-breaking palaces like Neuschwanstein Castle.
4. We then drove south to Austria to the city of Innsbruck, named after a bridge (*brücke*) over the River Inn. This is near Salzburg, so think of the scenery in *The Sound of Music* to get some idea of how beautiful the area is—or of the 1976 Winter Olympics, if you're old enough to remember those days.
5. We drove southwest from Innsbruck to a ski area in Austria in the Tyrolean Alps called Fiss/Ladis. From there we ventured up two valleys to other scenic ski resorts to the south—Kütai and Sölden in the Ötztal or Ötz Valley. (*Tal* is the German word for valley. You may have heard about *Emmentaler* cheese—probably the best of what we call Swiss cheese in America, with holes in it. That name just means that the cheese is produced in the valley in Switzerland through which the Emmen River flows. Just like *Install*, when you get a new computer. By the way, to the Swiss, all their cheeses are Swiss cheese—holes or no holes!)



Figure 8: The herd of Model A's at an inn in the Tyrolean Alps in Austria, 2001. Photo by Ken Mallory.

6. After crossing the Alps from north to south, we dropped by a Swiss Italian village called Poschiavo. Thankfully there was no more snow or ice! (Model A cars do not have heaters.) The day after that, we crossed Northern Italy past Lake Como and Lake Lugano until we got to the east shore of Lake Maggiore, a long skinny lake running north and south. The northern end of Lake Maggiore extends into Switzerland. From the mid-point, we crossed the lake on a ferry to the city of Stresa. Italy, which has a warmer, Mediterranean climate, gave us one panoramic vista after another!
7. From Stresa, we drove back north into Switzerland to one of the most spectacular places on earth, Grindelwald! To get up to Grindelwald, we had to drive over the Swiss Alps from south to north over the Grimsel Pass at about 7,100 feet. Without car heaters, it felt much higher. The following day, we took the cog railway through tunnels and past cliffs to the Jungfrau mountain.

At one point we got off the railway, walked through a tunnel carved through solid ice to a viewpoint. Unfortunately, the view was obscured by clouds below. But then a colorful tourist observation balloon suddenly rose through the clouds into the sunshine. This was surely an unexpected event! We wondered how the balloon operator was going to find his way back down. At 13,700 feet, the Jungfrau is not one of the tallest peaks in Switzerland but is massive in size. It is accompanied by two similar peaks to the east called the Monch and the Eiger—in English, the Young Lady with the Monk and the Ogre. Or, if you prefer, the Beauty and the Beast! Across the Lauterbrunnen Valley far below is another famous mountain called the Schilthorn. It is famous for a James Bond movie in which Bond skis down the mountain with bad guys chasing him on skis and shooting automatic rifles at him. To reach the peak of the Schilthorn, you have to take three separate cable-cars.

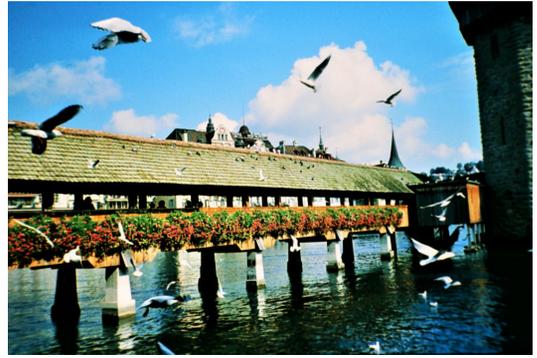


Figure 9 (Left): Ferrying Model A's across Lake Lucerne. **Figure 10 (Right):** Historic covered bridge over the river Ruesch in Lucerne. Both photos by Ken Mallory.

8. Nearing the end, we drove north and ferried our cars over Lake Lucerne and stayed in Weggis, a suburb of the scenic city of Lucerne. From there, we explored Lucerne, with old wooden covered foot bridges across the River Ruesch with colorful flower boxes along the sides. However, in the pediments of each strut is a triangular painting from the seventeenth century illustrating some aspect of death. Together the paintings are called the *Totentanz*, or the Dance of Death, to communicate to the citizens that death is universal for all men. There were originally 67 paintings, but only 45 remain today. The bridges were originally built to reach water-powered mills in the middle of the river. The chaff (*spreu*) left over from milling grain into meal and flour was dumped into the river from the bridge, thus the first bridge is called the *Spreuerbrücke*, or the chaffing bridge. At least chaff is organic and biodegradable.
9. Finally, we returned to Basel to drop off our cars for the voyage back to America and then to Zürich for our flights home.

How it turned out:

This was the Model A tour of a lifetime! Almost twenty years later, we're still telling stories about it. Imagine fifty Model A's driving into an alpine town with U.S. license plates, and the reactions of the townspeople, most of whom had never seen a Model A Ford! Invariably, the folks would talk and

interact with us. We really enjoyed visiting people on a personal level so unlike normal tourist situations. Everywhere, the locals provided us with unexpected, but much appreciated hospitality. For instance, at one point on a Sunday, we were having little success in finding a service station that was open in a small town on the sabbath. When we asked a local man for help, he got in his car and guided us to a service station that was open.

On the other hand, this trip included great challenges. Crossing the Alps twice was quite stressful for the cars—and for us, with only our love of motoring to keep us warm.

How the adventure affected our hearts and our memories:

All Model A Ford owners can tell you about the challenges and the thrills that we get when we take our cars out to places, but this tour stands out as really special. We were continually surprised by the number of people in other lands that have such a strong appreciation of the Model A Ford and express a shared affection with us. Plus, we have a perpetual bond with the other people who ventured out with us on this tour. Thankfully, we've had the opportunity to do later tours with them, and they have become close and special friends—an unintended consequence of our *Detroit Iron!*

Many thanks to Dick Canzoneri and Jim Macklin for their help in proofreading and fact-checking this article.



Figure 11: A young Terry Terrell, proud owner of the 1934 Plymouth Rumble-Seat Coupe De Luxe named "Shehasta." Terrell photo, 1947.

Yea Verily, in the Beginning there was *Shehasta*

Laron B. "Terry" Terrell

It was a hot afternoon in May of 1946. Dad was driving me from our ranch in the ol' '33 Dodge four-door, South on 60th East to Highway "I" in the Antelope Valley six miles east of Lancaster.

The month before, I had turned 16 and considered today a major step toward manhood. I was going to be issued a California driver's license. Most of the ranch kids I knew in my age bracket had been driving for a few years. If your feet could reach the pedal on anything that had an engine, you were considered a ranch hand able to drive if necessary.

I had a driver's license before I needed to shave. I'd been looking forward to shaving as a symbol of growing up. Little did I know then shaving over time was about as much fun as French Doors on a submarine.

Oh boy, after today I would be able to

drive alone. My range would be hither and yon over the Antelope Valley at will. With parental permission I could take Jo Alice to the one and only movie theater in town.

We arrived at the one-day-a-month DMV licensing location. I breezed through the written tests and was ready for the driving test. The DMV Rep got in and I started the ol' Dodge. He finally told me to leave the parking lot and turn right. A couple of stop signs later we were approaching the edge of town. The DMV guy said to turn left which I did.

No instructions at the next three-way stop sign. I looked and found him slid down in the seat, head laid back, and eyes closed with his mouth open just a little bit. My first thought was he had died on me. Without moving a muscle, he then said, "Drive around for a little while." Was this a trick? I didn't think so—he must've been tired.

This was the first time I had driven in town but it was easier than some of the dirt roads, alfalfa fields and tractors I had been driving for the last couple of years.

About 10 minutes later he suggested we should return to the licensing area. I followed him inside to a desk where he made some additions to some forms. He handed me a copy stating it was a temporary license and the real one would be delivered by mail.

I drove Dad back to our ranch. There I exhibited my temporary license to Mom and my sister Dorothy. Mom acted like she was highly impressed and my sister Dorothy didn't give a tinker's didly.

A few months later, Dad told me he heard a neighbor a couple of miles away had some sort of a ranch vehicle for sale at \$300. This was just a few months after the end of WWII. A few new automobiles, none of which I could afford, were just coming available. The waiting line was out of sight. Used vehicles of any quality were still expensive. However, any car for sale got my attention. The next day my curiosity got the best of me. I borrowed the Dodge to have a look see at this vehicle for myself.

I pulled into the neighbor's yard and there it was. The auto was thick with dirt, leaves and mud everywhere. It was a coupe with a rumble seat but the seat and trunk lid were missing. The rumble seat opening was full of dirty shovels, rakes, hoes and other dirt-moving idiot sticks. This rumble seat opening served the same purpose as the bed on a pickup truck.

The owner came out and agreed it was a dried trash mess. Everything else appeared to be in okay condition. He stated if he had to change the location of irrigation water to a different part of his alfalfa field during the middle of the night, a half mile or so away from the ranch house, he made sure the coupe was in perfect condition and would start every time needed. He said the missing parts were stored in the barn.

He started the engine and I drove around a few miles. I was impressed the way the vehicle performed. We shook hands on the \$300 deal. I should have hustled the owner on the price, but it had seemed okay with Dad. The

next day I went to the bank, removed \$300 and completed the purchase mud and all.

It was a bit of an emotional struggle to part with the \$300 from my account of only \$325. That \$300 represented a little Christmas and birthday money, but mostly countless hours of hard ranch labor over the last few years working for the neighbors. All of the able-bodied young men had either joined the military or were drafted during WWII. Anybody like me able to put in a hot 10-hour day on a tractor mower or the hauling and stacking 140 pound bales of Alfalfa from a bailing crew, had all of the work they wanted at a buck an hour. When working at home, this was family ranch work and there was no pay involved, just earning your keep.

I drove the mudball home, parked away from the garage but in reach of a garden hose and power cords. My dad asked if the mud was part of the deal, or if I paid extra. "Not funny, McGee," I quoted a phrase from a popular radio program. This mobile mess would take a lot of work to put the 1934 Plymouth Rumble-Seat Coupe De Luxe in acceptable condition.

She needed a large amount of work on everything. Why a She? All automobiles, at least in those days, were of the female persuasion. Maybe because she needed a lot of attention and delicate maintenance care. Ya think? *SHE HAS TA* have countless hours of attention to restore her youthful beauty. That's it, her name would be *Shehasta*.

I devoted as much time as possible to the resurrection of Shehasta. My friend Ron would stop by in his '30 Model A and assisted in this restoration when time permitted. It took a few weeks but the mud was removed, new seat covers, floor mats, all of the extra parts reinstalled. Shehasta was road worthy and visually acceptable.

I was able to show my lack of experience or good sense when I decided that Shehasta needed a new paint job in my favorite color, sky blue. Ron assisted in the hand sanding to smooth and remove what was left of the original black paint.

This sanding was very slow. We decided to use a lye solution to remove the unnecessary painted areas. We found that the lye did

not remove black paint, but did eat the canvas gaskets where the fenders were attached to the body of the car. That took another week or so to cut off the rusty bolts holding the fenders on and to make and replace the gaskets when reattaching the fenders. I can't remember if we finished the paint preparation, or if we just gave up.

Dad borrowed a neighbor's old paint sprayer outfit. He waited for a breezeless morning to apply the paint. The paint gun had a desire to spit some while spraying. The spit finish was not glass smooth. That error was later referred to as the pitted orange peel finish. She became my pride and joy.

I also discovered that owning your own car was another one of those large steps to manhood. The watch word was freedom which came with a large amount of responsibility, respect, and resourcefulness.

With parental approval on the first Saturday evening when Shehasta was drivable, Jo Alice and I drove to Lancaster's one and only theater for a movie date. At my age of 16 and Jo Alice at 15, we felt like we had almost achieved adulthood. It wasn't too long before we collectively found a suitable parking area out of sight of a passing car and farm folk. There we could hold hands and discuss solutions for the problems of the world.

About a year later my parents sold the 60th East Ranch and purchased the Beckwith Ranch outside of Modesto. This forced separation from Jo Alice was difficult, but we were able to find other partners as life moved on.

My parents moved on a Thursday with all of our belongings. Dorothy stayed with a girl friend to finish the semester. I had a track meet Saturday night at Ventura and stayed with Ron. Monday, I checked myself out of school and drove the 400 miles to the Beckwith Ranch.

Modesto High School required starting over within the school social circles and reorganizing my mornings at home. After cleaning up from my morning chores and milking the beautiful bovines I would usually miss the school bus and take Shehasta to school.

My first newly acquired friends at Modesto High were in the first and second chairs of the Alto Sax section of the school

band. I filled the third chair. Mike, Peg and I paled around frequently as they had limited transportation.

For unclear reasons Mike was required to live with his sister—this did not work out well. He spent most of his non-sleeping time at Peg and her Mom's home. Mike and Peg were both tall which seemed a good match. Peg had an overbite which Mike jokingly described as, "she could eat corn off the cob through a picket fence." Poor taste? Not the corn, his comment.

Mike knew Walter, another carless friend I found in our physics class. Friday evenings Mike and I would drive those foggy winter nights to Walter's home and the three of us would do the weeks' physics/science homework which was due on Monday. Walter's Mom fed us like there was no tomorrow. Mm. Good.

Shehasta had to have fog lights to get me through the winter fog banks. I installed them above the front bumper and they would light the road enough to avoid livestock or anything else solid within the next 50 feet.

When we gathered our girlfriends for some function, Shehasta was filled. Two couples in front and one couple in the rumble seat.

Later I removed the spare tire's holding brackets from the back of the coupe and filled the holes with additional brake lights. I then carried the tire in the rumble seat area. Whoever was picked up last received the spare tire on their porch. Fortunately, it was never needed.

The Modesto high school auditorium was in the midst of remodeling which resulted in chaos in the parking areas. When arriving early enough I found a small area adjacent to a shade tree to park. The area was sprinkled each morning to keep the dust to a minimum which left the ground damp.

On one of the early Modesto High days I decided to eat lunch in Shehasta. I slumped behind the wheel with the windows open an inch or so and relaxed. A few minutes later four male students arrived and used my car for a picnic table for their lunch. The engine hood received brown sacks as a table. The fenders and running boards became seats or

benches. Their lunch was immediately under way. I was not noticed in the car with the various shadows created by the tree.

A few years before I had installed a device which could charge the body of my car to sparkplug voltage while insulated by the tires from the ground. This device was originally to keep Jo Alice's dog from anointing my tires and hub caps. She wondered why her dog always ran to their barn when I turned into her driveway.

The ground wire used to complete the circuit was a small chain on a string which I could lower to the ground. When turned on, any animals or humans with their feet on the damp ground and touching the car enjoyed a jolt equal to that of an electric fence. Said voltage would not kill you, but a recipient could kill oneself trying to get away.

I could request my classmates to move on. Or, I could drop the ground chain and poke the switch button. Decisions, decisions...The device had not been used for months, but it still came alive with all of its glory and high voltage. Three of the four who were touching Shehastha and the damp ground yelled, jumped, and shook the car not understanding what had happened. The one seated on the fender was not touching the ground and had no reaction. He thought his friends were playing a joke.

I opened the door and got out to the surprise of the four. I felt a little guilty, made a slight apology and explained the voltage. The fender sitter wanted to know how to install one on his father's car. I would see them now and again but they no longer used my vehicle for a picnic table.

Friends who knew my high-voltage set up stayed at arm's length away from my car unless I assured them it was safe to board. They assumed their own cars were not charged. However, those old cars had metal bumpers and if Shehastha was parked bumper to bumper the other car was charged as well. My friends were quick learners, and jumped onto their running boards, isolating themselves from the ground with no problem.

During the summer of '47, Mike, Peg, and I played in the Stanislaus County Boys Band Inc. This summer band kept our lips in

shape for the school band in the fall. The Boys Band was paid to perform a hour concert inside the main gate at the California State fair in Sacramento. The volunteer band members were offered free entrance to the Fair if they participated in the band. The band director acquired a bus for us band members who needed transportation.

I drove Mike, Peg, and Walter to the fair grounds. Friend Walter was not in the band but he was slipped in anyway. Our entry concert went beautifully and was well received by the fair visitors. After the concert we were free to roam.

We visited many carnival booths where one purveyor was able to read "Boys Band" on our shirt. He asked why there were girls in the boy's band? Answering his own question by saying, "The boys in the band needed something to play on."

At 9 PM that evening we met as planned in the parking lot. Walter had received his driver's license a few months prior and again was begging me to allow him to drive Hwy 99 back to Modesto. I agreed as that would place me in the rumble seat for the first time. This put Walter in the driver seat, Peg in the middle, and Mike on the right inside the cab.

Somehow the cute clarinet player from our band was there to ride back to Modesto. In the rumble seat? With me? We had no choice but to take her as the bus had already departed. I never found out which one of my passengers agreed to her request for a ride back to Modesto. Maybe Peg as she sat behind said clarinet player. I was without a steady at the time and she may have believed I needed female companionship. For the next hour and a half our clarinet player was on me like white on rice just a kissin' 'n' a huggin'.

This is where dear ol' Dad's one-line sex education was remembered. "Don't have sex unless you want to marry 'um!" The little birds and bees were never mentioned. When ranch kids see a 1,400-pound bull mount a 1,100-pound cow no words are necessary.

I'm not complaining, you understand, but my one and only leisurely night ride in my rumble seat with the musical instruments was unexpectedly detoured. There was no future to this relationship as she was very

aggressive and could have placed both of us in harm's way.

Upon my return home in the dark that night I placed my dirty clothes in the laundry without turning on the lights, which might wake up the family.

Wash day, the next Monday morning, Mom showed up at my breakfast with my white shirt in hand showing that I had lipstick all over the collar and required some sort of an explanation. I did wash the lipstick from my face, but didn't think of my shirt. I do not believe dear ol' Mom ever bought what was really a true story. I tried to explain that she just showed up and needed a ride.

When remembering the lipstick white shirt collar caper, a thought crossed my mind. What if I'd said, "Mom, rest your troubled heart as your little boy is growing up. Be thankful there was no lip stick on my shorts." Nah, if I said that she might have missed the humor and I'd still be locked in the barn. I never messed with Mama.

In August of 1948, I confused patriotism with lack of smarts and joined the Navy—ours, of course. I should have stayed home. If there, I could have milked the beautiful bovines with the newly-acquired used milking machine each morning and evening. I could have completed the other ranch chores while trying to attend Modesto Junior College.

I returned home on leave to celebrate Christmas with family that year. I did sell Shehasta to my sister Dorothy for \$25 as her cash on hand. She had acquired a driver's license and had taken over driving Shehasta anyway. She drove the blue 1934 Plymouth De Luxe Coupe for many years.

Shehasta and the 60th East Ranch are long gone. However, in my mind's eye, even now, I can still see her pitted orange peel blue finish sparkling in the desert sun while parked in front of the ol' garage in the dirt driveway at the 60th East Ranch. Goodbye, Shehasta, you will live in my heart forever.

My '40 Ford Coupe

Alan Heller

It was the late 1950s in Silverlake, California and I was 15 1/2 years old with no driver's license. My dream was to own a car, and I wasn't going to wait. My father nixed the idea. My first step was money so I mowed lawns and worked odd jobs cleaning up neighbors' yards. My best paying job was working curbside at a pet food store which sold fresh meat. They paid me 50 cents an hour and I could pocket the tips! And of course, I was in school as a freshman at Marshal High School in the Las Feliz area. After several months my kitty was \$250. My dream was beginning to show promise.

One day I rode my bicycle into Hollywood and visited a parts supply store. In the back, the owner had a '40 Ford Coupe, the car of my dreams. It didn't run, of course, but it was a first step. After we made a deal on the big sale for my \$250, I was the proud owner. A friend towed it to my house, but since I had not yet enlightened my father on

the good news, I stored it in a neighbor's garage. I had no expertise on how to work on a car but learned on the fly. I pulled out the motor with a lift that I rented and dove in.

I finally told my dad, and he wasn't surprised since I always came home all greasy. He finally made me a hat out of newspaper to keep the grease out of my jelly roll and duck tail. I'm sure I looked rather silly. I had all my spare time dedicated to the car and continuing with odd jobs and, of course, going to school. Many nights I worked on the car into the late hours. My father would come over and say "Your girlfriend has called 3 times. She said you were supposed to pick her up hours ago for a date." I'd reply, "Tell her I'm tied up and I'll be there soon."

A working engine was my goal. I was a freshman in high school and had signed up for Auto Shop 1. I talked the auto shop instructor into letting me work on the engine although the class was structured to just

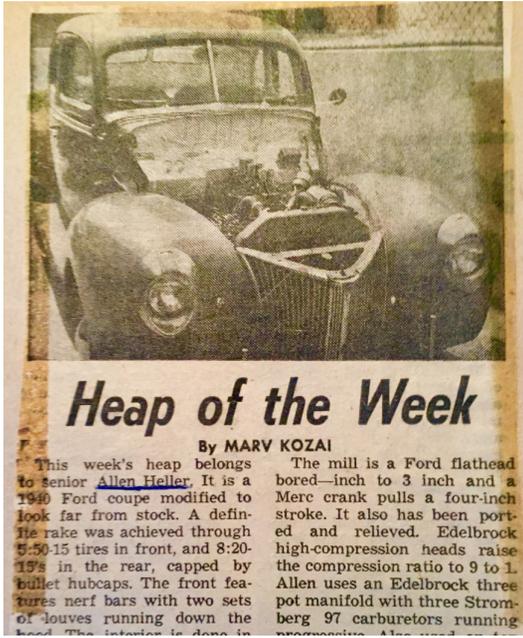


Figure 12 (Top Left): Alan Heller's auto shop project made it into his high school paper. Figure 13 (Top Right): Alan Heller administers the almost-daily ritual of percussive maintenance. Figure 14 (Bottom Left): Alan Heller dreams of road trips while he waits for his driver's license. Figure 15 (Bottom Right): The payoff—when the '40 Ford Coupe was finally working, it could be quite the girl magnet. All photos from Heller collection.

teach us how to change the oil and clean spark plugs. Seeing my passion, he agreed to let me work on my engine. I took the engine short block to the school and got it bored and stroked and a $\frac{3}{4}$ cam installed. My classmates were as excited as I was, and the project made the school paper in a column called "Heap of the Week." After getting the engine back together I got it back home. Using a neighbor's swing set frame, I lowered the newly rebuilt flathead Ford engine with three carburetors into the car. The car was now theoretically

in running order. I turned it on – it fired up, but I couldn't drive it because I didn't have a license yet.

Still, I had to see if it would run so I sneaked it out for a test run. A mile from my house it died. I checked under the hood and discovered a big puddle of oil under the car. My friend towed it back for me and on examination I found I had scored the cylinder walls and the engine was frozen because I had installed a plate backwards which caused the seal to be loose and it was leaking oil. For the

life of the car I had to put STP in every time I changed the oil to keep it from smoking.

Eventually, against my father's wishes, I obtained my license. I was 17 years old and more than ready. That is where life started! My friend, Ollie, had a '40 Ford also, so we became hot rodders. My friends were jealous. We now had running cars and could get to the beach! What to do? Surf of course. Threw those long boards on and headed west every chance we had.

By this time, I had transferred to Hollywood High School and had many part-time jobs in my senior year – a surgical supply company, a taco stand, Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital as a bus boy, whatever I could find. When I wasn't working, I was surfing. Oh, yeah, by that time I had a girlfriend named "Coco."

One of my fondest memories of that car was the night of my high school prom. I picked up Coco (now my wife of 56 years) and headed to Santa Monica for the prom. Driving on Hollywood Blvd the car stopped, and I couldn't start it. It turned out to be an electrical problem. As I worked feverishly in my corduroy suit, my date sobbed, her dreams of a perfect prom night dashed. Witnessing the scene, the station owner tried to help me, but then announced it would take hours to fix. Unbelievably, he insisted we take his car and promised by the time we returned after the prom the car would be ready. After an almost perfect evening followed by dinner at Pinks on Melrose and La Brea, we returned to the gas station, left his car with the keys in it, and drove ours home.

The car was never reliable and, as time went on, got to be a pain. I eventually sold it back to the parts store I had bought it from in the first place. The owner needed the parts and paid me well. What does a surfer do when he has no transportation? I worked at the taco stand for three weeks, all day, 7 days a week, took my earnings and flew to Hawaii for the summer to try my luck as a beach bum and full-time surfer.

But I will never forget my first car and all the people who helped me tow it, hide it, and fix it.



Figure 16: A Studebaker Champion 4-door, of roughly 1950 vintage, in Victor, Colorado, 1997.

"Bullet Nose Studebaker Champion Sedan"

Carla Lauren Bollinger

This poem was originally published as "Bullet Nose Studebaker" in *Blueline*, 1998, English Dept., Pottsdam College of the State University of New York. This version has a few revisions and updates:

You are American made,
forged in the South Bend factory.
Your ornamental chrome grill
once polished every Saturday.
The family bounced on your cord
upholstery as your tires skadooed over
ice, potholes and dips on tarred roads.

You rolled through mining towns
alive with men's sweat beading
on brawny forearms,
past farm houses where men,
women, children, toiled in fields;
past the banks, feed stores and
department shops; past critters
dashing through the aspens
under a forever sky.

Today, you rest alongside a deserted
building in Victor, Colorado,
a gold mining town, like you forgotten.
Snow adorns your hood and icicles hang
from your rusty frame.
Antique hunters drive by, pausing.
They nod, paying their respects,
knowing their new-fangled cars,
cheaply assembled in foreign lands,
will never receive a backward glance.

First car: 1952 Chevrolet 4-Door Deluxe

Carla Lauren Bollinger

I graduated from West High School, Torrance, in 1964, majoring in business, with secretarial skills, accounting, and business practices. What I didn't have was a driver's license or a car. My mom saw an announcement at her job for a '52 Chevy on sale for only \$25. She bought it even though it wasn't running. The kaput radiator got replaced. My father, back in town shortly after I graduated, gave me a few refresher driving lessons. It was years since I had taken Driver's Education—a required subject back then—in my Sophomore year. I was terrified, but desperate to drive a car, get a job, and jump start my adult life. After two 30 minute refresher driving courses under my belt, my father had me drive to the DMV for my driver's license application-test. He was leaving town the next day, so this was it. I had to pass.

I slid into the driver's seat and immediately a reign of terror descended. I couldn't figure out how to start the car. I looked in the rearview mirror and saw my father standing by the DMV building chewing his nails. Then I remembered the Chevy had a starter button, didn't start by a turn of the key. The DMV driver-tester checked off a "failed" box because I was slow to start the car. I carefully looked in all directions before pulling away from the curb and off I drove successfully maneuvering driving straight ahead. I used my hand signals correctly. Then I scored two more failure check-offs for inability to back up and parallel park. My chance of passing was narrowing. Good fortune finally happened. A large grocery semi-truck driver happened to pull out of a large strip-mall, turned right, but didn't look in our direction before making his move. I sensed his impending oversight and stopped in good time. The tester reported to me I was failing the test but he could tell I would eventually become a good driver. I passed my driver's test by a slim margin of one point.

I loved my '52 Chevy. Sure, others I worked alongside, engineers and office staff in a space-program industry, made fun of it

until the fateful day a torrential rain storm nearly flooded the parking lot. Several of my co-workers couldn't get their cars to start. I got into my Chevy, it started right up and off I drove. I loved the fabric upholstery bench seats, all that steel surrounding and protecting me, the car's heaviness as it hugged the road, and I always got a lot of attention when I drove that pea-green Chevy.



Figure 17: A 1952 Chevrolet Deluxe. Public domain internet photo.

The Descent to Work

David Fries

Dreams lift as sleep is swept away
Breaking fast with boiled beans
and unfolded newspaper

The amber glow burns a swatch
through the dawn
Silhouettes of cement canyons loom in the darkness

Trying to surge forward through the margins of asphalt
The glow pulses with every advance and halt

In perfect rhythm, the hum of starter and combustion
Is accompanied by the chorus of radials

Thoughts turn to flight and fancy
As they try to ponder their escape

The crescendo of activity greets the sun
Everyone will soon arrive at work ready
for the day to be done

'53 Chevy

Gary Turner

A '53 Chevy was my first car
And nothing in memory can ever mar
The fun times I had when driving each day
For I could always just get away
Away from home and I could be free
With my friends or a date it was always pure glee
It was dull brown in color with dents on the side
Scratches in the paint but it was MY ride
It was beautiful to me and always ran
And in the back seat I became a man

The old stick shift was three on a tree
I could shift with one hand to keep the other free
Free to hug my date and touch her hair
While she scooted on over and sat so near
Together we drove and I held her tight
And always got back before midnight
For curfews were early and most toed the line
We did what we wanted and got back in time
In time for the parents to not get in a fuss
And we never thought that life was unjust

The girls I dated were young like me
And each one had fun it was fun to be free
There was Irene and Beth and religious Birgitta
And Gloria and Kathy and smart Loretta
There were others too as I moved around
And never settled with just anyone
It was the '53 Chevy that made my life
Not school nor sports, just driving, no strife
At a drive-in movie we were free and alone
And when the night was right I didn't want to go home

At times first gear would stick when I'd shift
And I'd lift the hood and punch it for a fix
The transmission died and went totally out
So bought a used tranny at an autoshop about
Spent the weekend with my dad replacing the part
It was heavy and awkward but we got her to start
With the gears all in place it ran great again
And I was back on the road after one weekend
For we could fix a car back in the day
Just work hard, get greasy, and then drive away

We adjusted the points and plugs now and then
But cars could be fixed again and again
And working the car was good for the soul
The reward was there and it made a boy whole
With a wash and a wax it was fit for a king
And girls were impressed when you fixed anything
A plug gap was gauged with a measuring tin
And working the car was always a win
For we hadn't much money back in the day
And that which we had was for gas and for play

At the drive-in one night all dark and alone
It was Connie and I and we became one
In the backseat of the car we did our thing
Though we both knew what was happening
With no guilt or regret we went all the way
No matter how old I am I remember that day
And we loved each other and swore not to part
But as time moved along we just drifted apart
And each found another and we started again
She remained in my heart a special friend

The best time of life that I can recall
Was back in the '50s, when I had a ball
There was so much to live for and just being free
What a wonderful time it was enough for me
And what made it so great as I relive those days
Was the '53 Chevy and the hell we raised
Driving was freedom for every boy I knew
In my mind I relive it like it is brand new
And thinking of it now just blows my mind
That car is etched in my memory for all time



Figure 18: A 1953 Chevrolet Bel Air. Public domain internet photo.



Figure 19: Jim and His Queen at the San Pedro “Cars ‘N Stripes” show in 2017. Olds photo.

The ‘64 Impala Station Wagon Saga

Jim Olds

This is the story of my family car, the one I learned to drive in, my mom’s daily driver, my sisters’ car for the beach, the vacation mobile, and the vehicle I began my career commuting in. She is a famous make and model, a 1964 Chevrolet Impala station wagon in ermine white with a blue interior. In late 1964, my father purchased her from Beach Chevrolet in Long Beach to replace a 1953 Chevrolet Bel Air sedan. We called her “The Queen Mary” (the Queen) and she’s still all original with a 327 cubic inch 250 horsepower engine and 3-speed Power Glide automatic transmission. She sports most of the options available at that time: power windows, factory air conditioning, full-size spare tire, white sidewall tires, power brakes, even an electric rear power window. She is the last station wagon to survive in our area, as far as I know.

She made many long summer trips throughout the Southwest and Northwest states, through many national parks, back to

my grandmother’s home in Quanah, TX, and all over the South Bay as my mother’s “daily driver,” with extended loan outs to the three kids: Linda, Carole, and Jimmy (that’s me). She is the quintessential American family car of the mid-1950s through the late 1970s—an eight-passenger station wagon such as we all probably grew up in. No, she does not have the third bench seat in the rear compartment, you know, the one that faces the rear where the passengers had to breath all those wonderful gas fumes from the exhaust pipes below...I get that question a lot, even today.

We had lots of fun in the Queen, and did some work in her too. We hauled boxes of newspapers down to our church for their paper drives...now everyone wants to go paperless for some reason. One highlight was when the entire family had to spend the night in her while we waited for a campsite to open up the next day at Victoria, British Columbia. While the adults struggled all night for some comfort and my dad kept hitting the horn

whenever he moved, I had a nice little nest set up in the back since I was a little dude. Thanks mom!

One time, as a teenager with my learner's permit, mom let me drive down the hill to the bank. All the parking spaces were taken, except for one at the far end next to a low wall. So, as I wheeled the Queen into a wide turn, my mom warned that I was too close. Did I listen? Of course not, you know, teenagers know everything, right? She was right and I banged the wall with the side of the front fender. Luckily, the hit didn't do much damage and that block wall still bears the scars.

Another time, coming down the mountain grade into Riverside from Lake Arrowhead on a Sunday evening, the Queen started hiccupping, popping, and rumbling as one of the radiator hoses had broken. Dad said we could keep going downhill and probably make it to Riverside, where he knew of an Enco service station right by the freeway. You know, he was right, and we did just that. We left the car at the station that night and went back out the next day to retrieve it after it was repaired.

On one winter jaunt, we were surprised by a snow storm overnight and Dad was planning to drive down a mountain road to get home the next day. I remember sitting on the edge of the rear seat eagerly watching the road inch by. Dad had not put on the tire chains and was afraid to stop to do so as we passed many cars which had become stuck in high snow drifts to the right and left of the main road. But, once again, God saved us and we made it through the storm to safety at lower elevations.

I recall many times on summer trips sitting in the center of the big bench front seat next to my dad and enjoying that cool air blasting out the vents into my face. I had the AC reworked to the current configuration during the restoration in 2016, but it doesn't blow out as hard as I remember it. I guess that's the case with many things. We also made many camping trips for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Speaking of camping, I recall we hauled a lot of heavy equipment back in the day, you know, the Coleman stove and lantern, the Sears Ted Williams canvas tent, air

mattresses, the whole bit. Seemed like everything but the proverbial "kitchen sink." After a couple long camping trips, one from L.A. all the way up the coast to Canada, my folks decided we needed more storage. So, my dad built a large wooden storage box to put on the top of the wagon, actually on a Sears metal roof rack, which held everything just perfectly. He even made the box a little aerodynamic by giving it a wedge-shaped front that deflected most of the rushing wind. It sure helped us with the day-to-day camping chores of setting up and tearing down. And that good old Detroit 327 could still take it in stride. I still have that box too. Remember huffing and puffing to blow up those ribbed air mattresses, then having to sit on them to deflate them enough to fold and pack? Ah, the joys of camping! Boy, did we carry a lot of equipment! We all pitched in to help, but I had the lightest load since I was only a lad.

Another fond memory was using the Queen to haul our Riviera Vultures soccer team to games. I had joined the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) in 1969, not knowing much about the sport. My folks discussed what sport I should play... dad suggested football, but mom declined as she feared I'd be injured...she suggested Little League baseball, but dad didn't think that would be a good idea due to all the parents putting pressure on the batters. So we ended up joining AYSO where "everyone played." Also, AYSO originated in my home town of Torrance the same year as the Queen was born, 1964. Our car could hold nearly one-half of the team including Mr. Colby, our coach, and Max, an older black dog of Mr. Colby's, who was our mascot. Our team really came together during the season and we advanced through all the playoffs, getting to play at El Camino Community College and the L.A. Memorial Coliseum in the process.

We ended up being California State Champions my first year. Wow! My dad was so impressed with soccer that he later volunteered to help run District 12 and eventually became the Commissioner for the area. He was always known as "Mr. AYSO" because his initials were AYO, and he made several innovations to AYSO locally, by allowing

girls to join, setting up a scholarship program, and working with his Lions Club to sponsor an annual All-Stars match between Torrance high school stars and German semi-pro players.

Then we had the time when Mom forgot to set the transmission into “park” when she pulled into the driveway and did not set the parking brake. Later, we found that she had slipped her moorings and was docked across the street, perpendicular to the curb, having rolled down the hilly driveway first. Luckily, no one was going by at the wrong time! That would have definitely ruined their day!

I drove the Queen down to school at the University of Southern California near downtown. I was there many long days, coming home well after dark. One night I returned to my car after studying many hours for the CPA exam, only to find the small vent window on the passenger side open. Remember those? I found someone had pushed the window in and taken my under-dash 8-track player, but nothing else was broken. So, it wasn't too bad a loss.

Dad worked for Humble Oil for 40 years in marketing and real estate, during which time Humble was acquired by Standard Oil, which eventually became Exxon Oil Company. So our cars always had to use Exxon gas, my dad said it would choke on anything else! He always used Uniflo motor oil for “Happy Motoring.” You old-timers, do you remember their mascot Happy, the Oil Drop? And also their slogan, “See America, Best By Car?” Well, the Olds family took that one to heart. I think good maintenance is one reason the Queen is still with us. She even sported the famous Tiger Tail hanging from her gas tank door, that was from Humble's promotion to, “Put a Tiger in Your Tank.” Speaking of maintenance, one time Dad was in a hurry and was nagging the mechanic to finish the work. Unfortunately, the man had been drinking and was in a foul mood. As my dad turned away and started to walk away, the man flew into a rage and came after dad with a wrench. Since dad was facing the other way, he did not see the man coming, but luckily the drunk was not coordinated enough to land a direct blow. Nevertheless,

the wrench cut my dad's ear, which was bleeding profusely when he got home. Mom fixed it up at home. Needless to say, that mechanic was fired on the spot.

Another interesting story of the Queen related to my mom's enrollment in the Torrance Adult School (TAS) in the early 1990s where she took both furniture refinishing and upholstery. The latter came in handy when she decided to redo the Queen's interior. Mom attended the TAS classes twice per week during the day and became pretty proficient. The classes were a fun social time for many local senior citizens. But car upholstery is especially demanding and it's tough to get the sewing right to ensure the fabric will fit tightly over the cushions. She asked me to come help her as I was 18 years old and well able to pull and tug on that fabric while she stitched it and fastened it together with hog-tie rings. After about 3 or 4 weeks, it turned out really well as mom did a fantastic job. The interior looked like new and I think this was the only vehicle upholstery job undertaken by any student in the TAS. Twenty years later, her work would play an integral part in the decision to restore this automotive beauty to her former glory.

But, during the early 1990s mom's upholstery hobby led dad and I to become a bit anxious when we rode with mom as she was always on the lookout for castoff used furniture she could reupholster. When she would spy one, she'd ask dad to pull over to get it, and he would complain, but she'd reply that “There's plenty of room in the back.” We probably collected ten couches that way and I still have a couple to deal with, even today! The old “hide-a-bed” units were the worst as they had very heavy metal frames for the bed, which made them unwieldy to cajole up and into the wagon.

Now we come to the big restoration project. Mom had driven the Queen regularly until around 1999, when she purchased a new, loaded Buick Century with all the options. Once she had that, her use of the Queen dropped off drastically. In the meantime, Dad and I had newer cars of our own. So, the wagon sat for the next 15 years out on the driveway. I always wanted to get her back

running, but found it to be a daunting task. Made more so by not knowing where to start. Nevertheless, in 2013 I started the project— little did I know it would take nearly 3 years to complete. I began the mechanical work at the shop of a fellow Rotarian who did car restoration work. As it turned out, his forte was really Fords and his place turned out to be a real rip-off. They did do the work, but they charged a la carte prices to do it. In other words, for a job to replace 3 components that one could do simultaneously, they would charge you the price to disassemble it, make one repair, reassemble it, then disassemble it again, make the second repair, reassemble it, and so on. Luckily, once I realized this, I got the car back and never went back. Since the Queen had not really been driven for so long, I took her next to a good mechanical shop, Gasser's in Lomita, which has been operating since 1919, to assess what she needed and to commence those repairs.

The engine needed some work to rebuild the carburetor and we converted the front drum brakes to disc brakes for better safety. Of course, she needed the usual things like new hoses, gas tank, and radiator after some 50 years. But, all in all, they were pretty minor repairs. Gasser's also rebuilt the suspension with new springs, shocks, tie-rods, etc. so the car's foundation was solid. This work took about 4-5 months to complete. Next, I began to search for a body shop to repair and paint the body, to give the old girl a new dress and make-up. I thought this phase would be the home stretch. Boy, was I in for a big surprise!

The Queen had lived outside most of her life, about a mile from the beach. I had repaired several rust spots over the years, but did not think the body was that bad overall. The worst spots had been in the front fenders where the AC system drained condensation, but these were filled and repaired in the early 1980s by an aerospace engineer, one of our neighbors, who let me "help" him. And these had stayed pretty solid ever since, with only a small rust crack returning. I had some experience with body shops ever since my 1986 Honda Accord had been rear-ended badly and I shopped it around to have it repaired. So I thought getting the paint done would



Figure 20: The Queen is dead. Long live the Queen! After receiving a new body, the Impala station wagon gets a new coat of paint at Frank's Paint Booth in 2015. Here the Queen is masked (top) and unmasked (center and bottom). All photos by Jim Olds.

be fairly straightforward. I began to canvass the area to find a suitable shop. Many of the shops from the 1990s were gone and most of those left did not do the heavy-duty welding and repair work anymore. The industry

had changed. The shops now focus on the quick turnaround jobs to remove and replace fenders and panels on insurance work. After much searching, I was only able to find three shops that would give me a quote and their prices varied quite a bit. One of them I liked was run by a man named Frank and was located in Gardena.

Then, came the real shocker.....the shops told me that the internal steel frame, which supports the external car body, was too rusted to use, it could not be welded. They said the frame was too corroded to maintain structural integrity and recommended I get a new body. I thought to myself, how can I find a new body when the car is 50 years old? At this point I had spent around \$4,000 in the restoration, so I was sure disappointed to run up against this big roadblock. I did not know where to turn or what to do. My friend Carl, who has a 1956 Chevrolet 2-door dragster, offered to help and began searching the internet for parts. To make matters worse, during this phase one of the three shops who gave me quotes went out of business. So I only had two shops left to choose from in the South Bay area. I also began to search the Internet for parts. While we had some success locating individual parts, we did not see any full bodies available.

Well, God smiled down on me one day, and, lo and behold, I found José from La Habra, who happened to specialize in collecting station wagons. I called him and he said he had a 1964 Chevrolet Biscayne body available, so I immediately made an appointment to visit him. I also invited Carl and Frank to join me there to provide consulting advice and they both agreed to come. When we arrived, José met us at his front door and took us around to his back yard. There we found a tan Biscayne body under a Pop-Up nylon cover. Frank took a look at it and declared it sound, "Something I could work with." It was missing part of its floor under the driver seat area, but seemed complete otherwise. The three of us returned to the front yard to discuss the matter while José went back inside his home. I asked Frank again about the body and he said it would work on my Impala chassis and was a good body, free of

rust. Then I turned to Carl and asked him how much he thought like body might cost? Carl shrugged his shoulders and said it could run \$1,500-\$2,000. After a few more minutes, José returned and I asked him what he wanted for the body. He replied, "\$300." I said, "sold," and shook his hand. I ran to a local ATM to get some cash to pay him—I went ahead and paid him \$400 to be nice. I felt relieved and very lucky indeed that day.

Now came the challenge of getting the car body back to the South Bay. José called some of his friends and they pushed it from the back yard around to the front yard driveway. Funny, it was riding on a bed frame! I called one of my Rotary buddies who owns a tow truck business and he sent a flatbed truck to haul the body back home. I selected Frank's shop in Gardena to assemble the new car and paint it. So the car restoration could now continue at last! Frank and his crew sanded, welded, straightened, masked, primed, and painted the body. He then asked Carl and me to procure two new front fenders and a hood as the originals were corroded quite a bit. For example, it turns out that the Impala hood had a design flaw in that moisture would collect under the lip of the front center under the hood ornament, which caused rust. This area is under stress when the hood is opened, so it tends to crack and collapse over time. Also, Frank didn't like how our rust repair from the 1980s had not held up, so he recommended we replace the two front fenders with new ones.

The overall plan from this point was simple: stabilize the Biscayne body, remove the original car body, salvage everything we could from it, especially the interior as redone by my mother, install the new body on the frame, then reinstall the interior, and paint the entire car. Frank's forte was painting and the Queen came out looking great, as you can see in Figure 20.

At that point, Frank indicated he was going to take the car back to his home in Cypress to complete much of the detailed body work, as he didn't want any parts to be lost or damaged. As the shop owner, he wanted to do it himself to ensure it was done right. This sounded plausible enough, but did surprise



Figure 21: Jim “Mr. Cool” and His Queen at Torrance’s “Rock Around the Block” show in 2018. Olds Photo.

me a bit and I became worried since I would not be able to easily see the work in progress.

But, Frank and I worked together pretty well and I did not exert pressure on him to finish the car right away. He appreciated that freedom and took pride in his work. I delivered all the parts I had to him for installation. This did become an issue as later in the job Frank indicated I had not given him certain things and he was going to charge me more to acquire them. It turns out these parts were rare and Carl alleged that Frank stole them to resell to others to make more money. But, in the end, Frank did “find” them and they were installed on the car after all. I think Frank’s wife began nagging him to finish the job to get it out of their garage, so he went ahead and installed the parts I had delivered in the interest of time! There were a couple of parts missing or damaged, but I was able to buy replacements on the Internet, so it all turned out fine.

I am quite proud of the car now and have entered it in several car shows including the Port of Los Angeles’ “Cars ‘N Stripes,” Torrance’s “Rock Around the Block” celebration, the El Segundo, Seal Beach, and Cypress auto shows, and the Beach Cities rally to benefit veterans. I get a lot of interest in this family car, partly because most show folks grew up in station wagons and they are rare now. One fun thing is to see parents lifting up their small children to look inside and hear them explain what a “station wagon” was...kind of makes you feel old you know! Like when I refer to Oldsmobile...But, hey, it’s nice to be part of history, and part of keeping it alive as well—just like we Westerners do.

While 2020 has seen these car shows cancelled due to the pandemic, we all look forward to participating in them in 2021 (hopefully). See you all out on the highway, pardners!



Figure 22: Archaeologists are the Cowboys of Science. And, as the old saying goes: If you are an archaeologist, then show me your pickup truck! Here's mine, a 1970 Chevy that is now 50 years old, which I have driven for 40 years, and put more than one Million very hard miles on in seven different countries. I took this photo at the head of truck navigation (owing to snowdrifts) on May 31st, 1995 during a U.S. Forest Service archaeological project in Siskiyou County, California (Figure 23:3).

Cowboys of Science and the Million-Mile Chevy

Brian Dervin Dillon

Introduction

Yes, Virginia, archaeologists are *different* from most other *civilized* Americans. By “civilized” I don’t mean pinky-out, tea-slurping, upper-crust high society types, but *civilians*, city-dwellers in their comfortable, taken-for-granted cocoons of glass, steel, and cement. Civilians know which *fork* to use in what sequence in fancy restaurants, and which wine goes with which course. We archaeologists, on the other hand, know which *knife* to use when butchering deer or wild pigs after shooting them for dinner. And the lack of familiarity with fine wines has never stopped thirsty archaeologists from making our own *jungle juice* in our field camps.

For most academics, epic journeys of “adventure” involve visiting libraries in cities different from their own. We archaeologists, conversely, prefer doing field research in free-fire zones, since this cuts down on uninvited visitors and pettifogging bureaucrats cutting into our limited research time.

Common occupational hazards for most “civilian” academics like historians are paper cuts and overdue book fines, while those for archaeologists are malaria and .45-caliber lead poisoning.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between historians and archaeologists is that every academic humanist, historians included, tends to be a *solo* act in his or her research, writing, and teaching, while no archaeologist ever made any discovery nor dug up any lost city by himself. Every successful prehistorian has always been the “chief” of a little tribe of time-travelers, all of them living in out-of-the-way places and withstanding daily hardships in order to expose things seen by no other human eyes for hundreds or thousands of years. The badge of honor for all archaeologists, and the symbol by which we can be differentiated from lesser academic mortals is our *Pickup Trucks*.

If most historians are *chairborne civilians*, then we archaeologists, as noted in a previous issue of the *Branding Iron*, are the



Figure 23: You cannot do archaeology within your own Zip Code. Satellite image of North and Central America, showing archaeological research locations and driving routes to them I have traveled over the past 40 years in my 1970 Chevy pickup truck. Between 5 and 12 700-to-900 mile round-trip research ventures were made annually between Los Angeles, California (1) and Calaveras, Amador, or Eldorado Counties (2) and Siskiyou, Shasta, Lassen or Modoc Counties (3) for round-trips of 1400 to 1600 miles. Much longer trips were also made on eight separate occasions all the way down through Mexico either by the Pacific Coast (7), the Central Mountain (8) or the Texas (6) and Gulf Coast (9) routes to Central America, for fieldwork in Highland Guatemala (10), in the Maya Lowlands (11), in Highland Honduras (14) and Pacific Costa Rica (16). Each such round-trip totaled between 8,000 and 12,000 very hard miles. Added to all of these “high-mileage” excursions in my Million-mile Chevy were also 200+ shorter distance archaeological field projects of only 200 to 900 miles round-trip in 46 of California’s 58 counties, and research junkets to Nevada, Utah (4), Arizona, New Mexico (5), etc., of only 1,000 to 2,000 miles per round trip. Finally, 80+ week-long field archaeology classes were taught all over California during a 17-year period, involving drives of up to 1,400 miles round trip each time, not to mention many years of UCLA field classes all over Southern California, and hundreds of Boy Scout outings. Base image courtesy of NASA, additions by B. Dillon, 2019.

*Cowboys of Science.*¹ But unlike the western *vaqueros* of yesteryear, we modern *Cowboys of Science* now rely on *Detroit Iron* more than horseflesh. For us rip-snorting, hot-rodding, archaeologists, our trusty steeds are most often small-block V8 Ford or Chevrolet pickup trucks running compound, granny-low, 4-Speed transmissions sitting on tall, fat, off-road tires. My own archaeological field rig is in fact, a *Redneck Dream Vehicle*: a 300-dollar truck rolling on 600 dollars worth of tires.

We archaeologists were mostly raised

by wild dogs. Few of us are entirely housebroken, nor are we completely at ease in cities where we cannot bed down and see the stars overhead. Normal, daily, archaeological concerns, at least in my own experience, unknown and alien to historians, include planning your research and travel schedule around your next malaria attack,² talking your way out of jail,³ keeping your students out of jail,⁴ hauling your crew members off to the hospital⁵ or, occasionally, operating on them yourself.⁶ For most historians the worst



Figure 24: My 1970 Chevy pickup truck (at far right) parked next to my beachfront field camp in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, in 1981 (Figure 23:16). I drove it 4,000+ miles down from California, hauling my students, and field and camp gear for an extended excavation season. I am wading out (at left) to my workboat to fire up my outboard motor for the short saltwater trip across the bay to my archaeological site on the opposite shore. At the end of this field season, all of my UCLA students, panicked because of the politico-military doings in Revolutionary Nicaragua next door, “jumped ship” and flew home. So I drove back to Gringolândia alone.

result of “peer review” is being denied tenure, while for archaeologists a “negative peer review,” at least in Central America, can land you in a shallow, unmarked, grave.⁷

Don’t get me wrong. I neither have anything against historians, nor am I a stranger to them, since I was raised by one and then, in turn, I raised another. My own father was the most accomplished and productive historian I ever knew and now my son is also an historian following in his grandfather’s footsteps. But my father, like most historians and, for that matter, the vast majority of academics, was a mechanical maladroït. He couldn’t change a spark plug to save his life. The only time he ever changed a flat tire, near Fresno in 1958, the whole family had the unutterable joy of seeing the just-mounted spare come flying past us and continue southwards down Highway 99 as the right-rear corner of our station wagon hit the asphalt, throwing sparks everywhere. Dear old Dad’s flat tire/spare tire exchange had one small but very important omission: he forgot to tighten the lug nuts after thumbing them onto their studs.

The Million-Mile Chevy

The old archaeological saying goes: “So, if you are an archaeologist, where’s your pickup truck?” Mine is the only archaeological field vehicle in the world that began its life as a privately-owned rig, then became a California state truck, then was returned to private ownership, all controlled and driven by the same person: me. My 1970 Chevy $\frac{3}{4}$ ton long-bed began life as an Oregon logger’s rig, set up for grunting around on dirt roads, with triple gas tanks and a compound “granny low” 4 speed transmission. I bought it when it was ten years old with money raised by doing California contract archaeology, and then donated it to UCLA, where it became my own state truck. It has more than a million very hard field miles on it, and is presently on its 5th engine, its 3rd transmission, its 3rd rear end, and its 8th windshield. Its first very long trip, in 1981, was to Guanacaste, Costa Rica (Figure 24) for an extended archaeological project. It subsequently made many more trips from California down to, through, and back from Central America (Figures 25-29,



Figure 25: Rush-hour in Honduras, on an unimproved branch of the Pan-American highway (Figure 23:14). Here cattle have the right-of-way over motor vehicles. California "off-road" enthusiasts would be reduced to quivering masses of ectoplasm by road conditions Central American archaeologists face daily. Dillon photo, 1983.

31-33). It was also an archaeological field vehicle on desert, mountain, and even offshore island projects throughout the length and breadth of California (Figure 22, 30).

Like a cat with nine lives, over the forty years we have been constant companions my old truck has survived several "life threatening" episodes. It was "officially" taken away from me once and turned over to UCLA students not under my direct supervision. They punctured its radiator, drove it 250 miles without coolant, destroyed its engine and abandoned it in the Inyo County desert for six months. So I had it towed back to UCLA, and bought it back from the University for \$300.00 after it had been ruled "unsalvageable." The "E plates" came off and commercial plates went on after I rebuilt its engine.

Another time I hit a small sedan on the 101 Freeway at full speed. The other car was up on two wheels, sideways, in my lane. I thought, "So that's what a catalytic converter looks like from the underside," right before I smashed in all of my front sheet metal and tweaked my frame. But after pulling its frame straight on a jig, and getting all new (actually, "pre-owned") sheet metal from the wrecking yard, and two "new" doors (found abandoned in a back alley on trash day), my

truck was whole again.

And then, around five years ago, I blew up engine number 4 on the hottest day of the year in the San Joaquin Valley. My long-suffering wife finally convinced me that, at age 60+ I was *way too old* to wrench on dead engines with tools too hot to touch. So I regretfully sold my moribund old bomb to Andy Florez, a friend and former UCLA student, who had been begging me for it for years. Andy dropped engine number 5 in my truck and then *gave it back to me*, in gratitude to his favorite teacher, with no strings attached. Two years ago, my beloved old truck was stolen off the street right in front of my house. Miraculously, it was recovered less than a week later.

My friend of 30+ years, Andy Florez, whose grandfather used to throw rocks at a very young (pre-West Point) George S. Patton on the streets of San Marino, died after a long illness at the end of January 2020. I drove my/our Million-Mile Chevy to put him in his grave on the last day of the month: it was the first vehicle behind the hearse. At 3 A.M. the following morning, my beloved old pickup truck was stolen from right in front of my house, *the second time in two years*. A friend spotted my truck later in the day, and



Figure 26: When you sink your truck crossing a stream, just build a small dam upstream to lower the water level, then go looking for an ox-team to pull you out. My new friends at right told me that I was the first guy to drive down this road in five years, and that the last fellow also got stuck right here too. Highland Honduras, 1983 (Figure 23:14). Previously published as Figure 7.6a, Dillon 1989.

gave chase but at the I-5/170 Freeway split unfortunately the thief zigged right, while my buddy was stuck in the far left lane on I-5. His last sight of my old Chevy was of it headed south on the 170 towards the border. As if my life were a sad Country-Western song, the *Pickup Truck Gods gave, and the Pickup Truck Gods took away*. But then, a week later, my son John by pure chance found my poor old truck abandoned with its drive train destroyed, two miles from my home. So now, time for rebuild number 6...or is it 7?

So despite leaving me repeatedly, and suffering almost-fatal wounds, my Million-Mile Chevy always returned: an automotive "Lassie come home" story in five episodes over four decades.

After the first couple of hundred thousand miles, you come to know the strong and weak points of your vehicle as intimately as you do those of your spouse. And, if it need be said, you must be just as forgiving and understanding of your pickup truck's shortcomings as those of your wife. Chevy 2-wheel-drive rigs have the best front suspension, in terms of handling, next to sports cars: the double-wishbone system makes the heavy truck handle like a Corvette. Unlike

Fords with "Twin I-Beams" the Chevys don't wear out tires but, unfortunately, their weak points are ball joints and A-arm hinges (Figure 39). The former break with great regularity, while the latter go out of round and eventually destroy their housings. So you get in the habit of carrying a couple of spare ball joints in your toolbox. Also in the "plus column," the Chevy small block V8 is *the most common* and one of the most reliable of all V8 engines on the planet (Figures 34, 40, 41, 43). The same engine can be found in passenger cars, vans and trucks, all of them basically the same from 1955 right up to the present day. External parts (water pump, gas pump, etc.) from one will interchange with any other, and minor "hot-rodding" or upgrading to improve horsepower, torque, and fuel economy is quite simple.

I set up my old Chevy truck as a kind of hot-rod tractor adapted for long-distance cruising between my home base and my research locations all over the Western United States and Central America (Figure 23). It has so much low-end grunt that I can set the carburetor idle screw to 1,000 rpm, then put the old bomb in compound low 1st gear, and walk alongside it, steering it through the

open driver's side window as it creeps along at 5 mph. And, with 3.50 rear end gearing, even with a V8, it averages around 18 to 20 mpg in 4th gear over those long, long drives from California all the way through Mexico down to Guatemala.

During the past forty years my truck has had three different camper shells, two different front bumpers, and 307, 327 and 350 CID engines. It has gone from a thrifty, gas-sipping two-barrel carb/manifold, to a fire-breathing 4 barrel set up (Figures 42-43), and from inefficient cast-iron "rams horn" exhaust manifolds to custom, "basket of snakes" 4-into-1 headers, and finally to the sublime tri-Y headers tuned to its own firing order, running through "twice pipes" just like any hot rod.

I was so impressed with how much fieldwork I could do with the *perfect* archaeological field vehicle that I published a paper urging my archaeological peers and students to follow suit. In response to this *Deathless Dillon Prose*, the Ivory-Tower crowd squawked and bleated: "Where's the *theoretical* value? How does this advance the study of prehistoric *elites*? How 'proletarian' a subject to write about!" But I laughed all the way to the bank, for this article and the "how to" logistical monograph I published it in quickly ran through its first printing, was republished, then completely overhauled (pun intended) and republished in a second, revised edition, and then again in a third edition.⁸ It also proved that I could do contract archaeology for Federal, State, and local clients much more cheaply and efficiently than the *Ivory Toweroids*, those effete "elites" who mistakenly believed that they had to go out and rent expensive 4WD rigs, then pass such inflated costs on to potential clients. Since my own bids came in at half of theirs, I always won the contracts. My Ivory Tower competitors were left to stew in their own juices, *theorizing* instead of *archaeologizing*.

Off to the Rodeo

Archaeologists do everything historians do, but much, much, more. Just like historians, we *prehistorians* compete for scarce

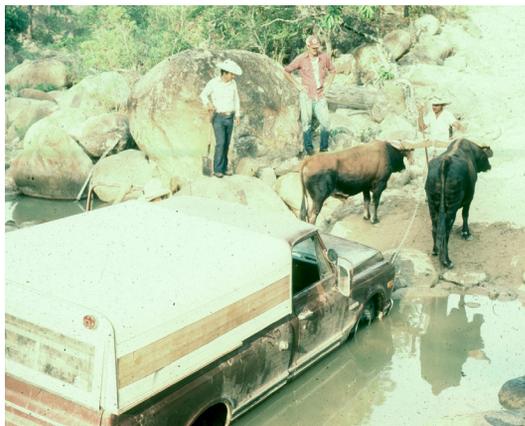


Figure 27: Here an ox-team, usually employed in logging efforts, pulls me out of a streambed in Honduras in 1983 (Figure 23: 14). Previously published as Figure 7.6b, Dillon 1989.

research money and submit proposal after proposal to tight-fisted granting agencies. We haunt libraries and archives hither and yon searching for maps, documents and publications on our research topics and locations, and try to read everything ever written about them by anybody, living or dead, in any language. And, of course, we write up the goals, methods, and results of our research. But these tasks comprise *the whole shebang* for historians, while they are merely the first, *initial*, steps for archaeologists. All are necessary pre-requisites just for going out the door on the first day of any field archaeology project, and represent perhaps only 10% of the total effort expended.

A basic credo of all field archaeologists, one absolutely incomprehensible to historians, is that *logistics is king*. Logistical ability dictates what you can or cannot do, whether you blaze a brand-new path through your discipline, or merely join the chorus of timid imitators all singing the same one-note symphony of minor variations on stale old topics rehashed within some musty library. Unlike historians who wait for the library to be unlocked, we archaeologists "unlock" dirt roads closed by snowdrifts, boulders and fallen trees, just to get to our study locations. For 20+ years I overcame such obstacles by ramming them with the \$35.00 wrecking-yard tow-truck bumper I bolted to my Chevy



Figure 28 (Left): When the road is too narrow for your pickup truck, make it wider. The substrate is poorly consolidated volcanic tuff, easy to chop away (at left), but equally unstable for a 3+ ton truck to drive over (at right). No “pussyfooting” here, passage at the highest speed possible is required, over plywood load-spreaders, to avoid bank collapse. Honduras, 1983 (Figure 23: 14). Previously published as Figure 7.3, Dillon 1989. **Figure 29 (Right):** When the road disappears, build one. We are about to cut down a small, nearby forest, and make a “corduroy” road of parallel tree-trunks under and in front of my trusty, but immobilized, pickup truck. Honduras, 1983 (Figure 23: 14). Mal Sibberensen at left. Previously published as Figure 7.4, Dillon 1989.

pickup (Figure 22). We Cowboys of Science are usually the first ones into the woods during the Spring thaw, long before anybody else attempts entry. And that is just the “easy” fieldwork done in this country. Fieldwork in other places, like Central America, is, of course, 1,000% more challenging.

After securing funding for pro-bono research or your contract for environmental compliance, you now must get your written survey/excavation permits from the landowner, public agency, or foreign government. Your petition for the latter is always conducted long-distance, and usually in a language not your own. For foreign research you now must secure all of your “good conduct” testimonials from your home university, your local law enforcement authorities, and the nearest consulate or embassy of the country you will be working in.⁹

Then you sign up your field crew of unpaid student volunteers. Each must be willing to undergo hardships, hard work, and deprivation that would make most U.S. Marines throw temper tantrums. You must also make certain that none of them are pathological liars, confrontational sociopaths, suicidal manic-depressives, congenitally lazy,¹⁰ or so stupid, careless, or clumsy they might

harm themselves, other crew members, or you.¹¹ Now you must ensure that everybody gets the battery of inoculations (against yellow fever, hepatitis, etc.) from the Center for Disease Control, and begins their anti-malaria regimen at least two weeks before any possibility of exposure, all of this long before you ever turn the key in your truck’s ignition.

Then comes the 2,000, 4,000, or 6,000-mile drive, with multiple drivers rotating shifts so that you keep your rig moving 24 hours a day. Included are border crossings, with checks of passports, vehicle papers, and letters of recommendation. Your plain black necktie comes out of the glove box and over your shirt five miles before each border crossing. It silently informs the immigration officials and customs goons that you respect their authority; you are presenting yourself as their honest, respectable, equal, neither a pompous foreigner, nor a craven potential victim. There are also “surprise” moonlit stops at roadblocks manned by police, soldiers, or, most disconcerting, armed “civilians” (no uniforms) who could either be A): communist guerillas; B): undercover counterinsurgency operatives; C): death squads; or D): plain old highway robbers. And you must always be ready for the periodic



Figure 30: *Meanwhile, back in Gringolândia...For more than thirty years I spent the “California Winter” doing archaeology in Central America, since, with the seasons reversed, that time of year is the Dry Season in Mayaland. Then, once the rains came, I headed north to do archaeology in California during our own “summer,” the Central American rainy season. I was also, probably, the only American archaeologist to have U.S. contract archaeology (done on a paid basis) support pro-bono Central American archaeology, on a rotating basis. Here, curious Stanford students surround my archaeological field vehicle in the tule fog, as we begin a UCLA/U.S. Army Corps of Engineers field project in Fresno County, California, 1983. Dillon photo.*

“extortion stops” by crooked cops with their hands out.¹² All such interaction, of course, involves face-to-face exchanges, and defusing hostile confrontations in Spanish. Having guns shoved up your nose, and talking your way out of getting shot, is just part of everyday roadside etiquette south of the Border.

Finally, when you reach your far-distant destination, you must build your field camp,¹³ find and hire workmen that will neither rob you, nor chop each other (or God forbid, you) up with machetes on Friday night after payday, nor get sick or die on you. You must find a way to supply your camp with food; if you are too isolated and far from any source of supply to buy it, then you must grow it or shoot it yourself.¹⁴ And now you must also make nice with the local authorities, and reassure your neighbors, if you have any, that you are harmless, that you will eventually leave and that all of the strange, unintelligible things you are doing will come to an end after a few months. And, *of course* you would be happy to fix your neighbors’ non-functioning outboard motors, generators, etc., with the only complete tool kit within the surrounding 500 square miles you brought down from *Gringolândia*.

And then there are the “cultural” adventures. At the end of my 1981 field season in Costa Rica, crooked government officials

stole my outboard motor, generator, alidade and other equipment I had hauled down from the U.S. Then they tried to steal my truck, as they had from another Gringo archaeologist, but I outwitted them by leaving one day before I “promised” I would. Then, I drove back to the *Free World* through Revolutionary Nicaragua (Figure 23: 15) under “house arrest” inside my own cab, with a Sandinista soldier holding a gun on me. The commies sealed my doors, and told me to drive all the way to the Honduran border *in a single day* or they would impound my pickup. So I put the hammer down and did so.

In 1983 in Honduras my permit was held up. The archaeology boss for the entire country told me, while slapping a blackjack into his palm, that he would issue my permit if I could get one of his own, Honduran Government, trucks running. Fortunately, it was an old Chevy, similar to my own. After half an hour of diagnosis, and two hours of fixing 1: its fuel system; 2: its drive train, and 3: re-setting its starter motor, I got it running. The *Jefe Primero* not only wrote out my permit, but gave me the use of this second truck for the entire field season as well.

During this same season in Honduras one day we were grunting up a mountain in low gear, and had to pull over to let a terrified mule pass us. He was dragging a dead



Figure 31 (Left): Normal Central American road conditions on the only road from my field camp to town. The ruts in some places are deeper than my truck is tall. Badly-mired vehicles on this road often ended up as permanent fixtures, with the track then making “dog legs” around them. Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, 1990. **Figure 32 (Right):** Pegada en la selva, otra vez...(Stuck in the jungle...again). In the Central American rain forest, most “roads” are simply linear clearings winding around the largest trees, their surfaces the consistency of gluey soap. When you get your truck stuck, jack it up with your sheepherder’s jack (at left corner of rear bumper) then cut a trail to the nearest forest giant with your machete, loop a length of chain around it, and winch yourself back onto the track with your trusty “come-alongs” (hand-crank winches). Salinas de los Nueve Cerros, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, 1990. Both Dillon photos, (both Figure 23: 11).

horse at the end of a long rope down the rocky track, encouraged by the eight-year-old *arriero* behind, guiding him, local fashion, with pebbles thrown at his head. Doubtless the *caballo difunto* was *en route* to the nearest French restaurant, and being “tenderized.”

And then there was the time I was driving back from Guatemala in 1990, with a student in my cab, a Japanese National, whose California driver’s license had been stolen when he was pick-pocketed by twin prostitutes—the old bump, crotch-grab, and steal routine. We rehearsed what to do if stopped with him behind the wheel: this, of course, happened at 2 A.M. as we were driving through San Luís Potosí, only a short distance from the Texas border. My student expostulated in rapid-fire Japanese, proffering his passport, and I pretended to translate what he was saying into Spanish, claiming that he was a *Diplomat*, and that with a *Diplomatic Passport* (in *Kanji* script) he didn’t need an actual driver’s license. The two Mexican motorcycle cops threatened to impound my truck and haul my student off to

jail, but we pleaded so long and so earnestly that first one cop, then the other, finally burst out laughing. The “Diplomatic” passport was returned, and I was ordered: “O.K., Gringo, now *you* drive the rest of the way to Texas.”

Not all of my Chevy truck adventures took place in Latin America: many others went down in the U.S. of A. One day, after doing an archaeological survey in the Sierra Pelona of Los Angeles County, ten miles from the nearest paved road, I got into my Chevy, backed it up and immediately heard twin small explosions, as my rear end quickly settled. Yes indeed, some anti-social local had leaned twin ten-penny nails up against both rear tires, giving me not one but two flats. After mounting my only spare tire, I rolled one of the two flat tires ten miles down the canyon to the nearest gas station, paid for the puncture repair, then began rolling the fixed flat ten miles back up the canyon. My thumb was out until a kindly motorist not only picked me up, but drove me all the way back to my three-legged truck.

And then there was the time that the U.S.



Figure 33: My Time Machine and its time-traveling passengers. My trusty old Chevy pickup truck next to one of the bodegas at the Guatemalan National Museum (Figure 23: 10). My field/laboratory crew standing at right. (L-R): Kekchi Maya Marcelo Tot, his older brother the late Mariano Tot, my student Nobukatsu Hasebe, a Japanese national, and an unidentified Museum guard. Dillon photo, 1990.

Navy put my Chevy on a barge, and floated it over to San Clemente Island, where UCLA was doing archaeology 80 miles offshore from San Diego. Here the U.S. Marine Corps practices amphibious landings and Navy SEALs do underwater demolition training. Since our UCLA archaeological crew was co-ed, the SEALs would visit with presents for the girls, like Hefty Trash Bags full of (400+) abalone. One day one of the SEALs asked if anybody was interested in some BBQ pork—and I said, “Sure!” Then he said, “Well, now we have to go get it...” So we drove my old Chevy down to a beach on the backside of the island where a Marine detachment was celebrating completion of a training exercise. *Uncle Sam’s Misguided Children* had shot three or four of the very large wild pigs (considered pests on the island): these were roasting on spits over driftwood fires. All of the Jarheads were drunk, their inert forms rolling in the surf as the waves came in and out. I backed my truck up to the nearest fire, lowered its tailgate, and my Navy SEAL buddy and I lifted the very heavy pig off the coals, and tossed it in the back of my Chevy. Gunning the engine, we flew off the beach and made our escape. On that day, I came, I saw, and I stole from the Marine Corps.

My beloved pickup truck has featured in

the memories and photographs of hundreds of archaeology students from UCLA, U.C. Berkeley, Cal State Long Beach, and Chico State, as well as a couple thousand California and Nevada RPFs. Its photograph has been on the front page of the “Valley Section” of the *Los Angeles Times* Newspaper. On two occasions, it has even been featured in *cartoons*, once in Guatemala, shown in a series of panels as it dies, and then comes back to life in a cornfield, and the second time in California, when an animated version of it jumped all over the web page dedicated to one of my UCLA Archaeological Field Classes, way back when the internet was new.

**Drive it, Break it, Fix it, Drive it
(Repeat as Necessary)**

Despite the modern reliance upon Detroit Iron instead of horseflesh, the old cowboy admonition still holds true: at day’s end, take care of your horse/pickup truck first, then worry about its rider/driver. I am philosophical about breakdowns and repairs: I like to say that this is God’s way of getting me off the road just when some homicidal/suicidal maniac might otherwise drive into me at high speed. During the course of 1,000,000+ miles of travel many of my “adventures” have

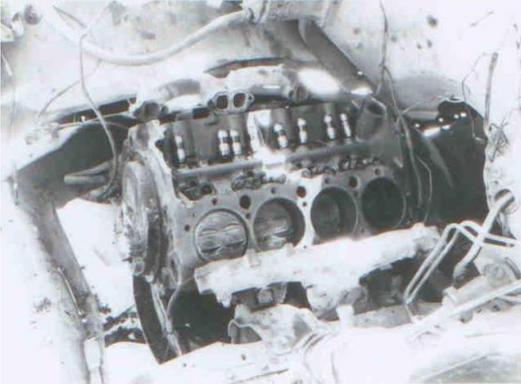


Figure 34 (Top Left): Teardown number 1...or was it two? Stripped block in my engine bay in 1986, after UCLA students punctured the radiator, drove the truck 250 miles with no coolant, blew both head gaskets, melted the valve seats, froze the engine, then abandoned the truck in the Inyo County Desert for six months. **Figure 35 (Bottom Left):** Rehabbed top end parts before installation. **Figure 36 (Top Right):** New clutch No. 7 (or was it 8?) going in, mid-1990s. New pressure plate, driven plate, throwout bearing, etc. and resurfaced flywheel before installation. Total cost: \$85.00, less than 1/6th of what some grease monkey would charge to do this job. **Figure 37 (Bottom Right):** Compound Granny-Low 4-Speed Transmission No. 3 going back in, after being rebuilt. Total cost of re-build: \$350.00. All four Dillon photos.

been mechanical ones. Like the time we were grunting through traffic in Tapachula, the last big Mexican town before the Guatemalan border, and my clutch linkage fell out onto the cobblestoned street. While my students directed traffic away from my rig, I crawled underneath and put everything back the way it was supposed to be, using a big rubber band as a temporary fix for the broken spring that had let everything go.

Perhaps the most remarkable feat of vehicular derring-do was on a return trip from Central America, when my clutch began to “go” around Guaymas, on the Mexican Pacific Coast, and then took permanent *French leave* by the time I hit Hermosillo. I turned the

ignition off in the giant Pemex station at the top of the hill next to the Territorial Prison, and filled all three gas tanks, 48 gallons in all. Then I got a dozen Pemex employees to push-start my 3-ton truck, jammed in 4th gear. Shudder, shudder...pop! Shudder pop, POP! And finally, lugging and backfiring, I got it started. Now I had to drive all the way back to L.A. jammed in gear with no clutch. Of all the border crossings I could select from, only Nogales would not land me in the middle of stop lights and traffic. I stopped once, at the Nogales U.S. Border, and persuaded six U.S. Border Patrol Agents to help me push-start the old bomb again, still jammed in 4th gear. I got home after driving more than 24 hours



Drive it, break it, fix it, drive it...**Figure 38 (Left):** Welding broken brackets by the side of the road; the hot lead is a length of chain thrown over the power lines above, the “rod” is a coat-hanger. The cost of the job (\$5.00) was low because the welder had no “overhead” expenses like safety equipment (welding masks, gloves, etc). West Mexico, 1990, (Figure 23: 7). **Figure 39 (Right):** My pickup hors de combat, by the side of the road in the rain forest, after I have broken (from left to right) one of my wishbones, a coil spring, three shock absorbers, and a tie-rod end. I dumped all of the broken parts in a burlap bag, hired a local Indian to watch my truck (not abandoned, just resting) and stuck my thumb out. After hitch-hiking over two mountain ranges, around 48 hours later, in the nearest wrecking yard, I did a visual match-up and replaced the broken parts with serviceable used ones. Then I stuck my thumb out all over again, and headed back to my “resting” vehicle. Alta Verapaz, Guatemala (Figure 23: 11). Both Dillon photos.

straight, 725+ miles, without a clutch.

And then there was the time when I was sleeping in the back of the *Hotel Chevrolet* while one of my students was driving, at high speed, through the Texas Big Bend country as we headed home from Guatemala. He hit a deer at around 80 mph and pushed the left fender back so far it pinned the driver’s door closed. So, after a momentary levitation from the impact, I exerted my authority, moved him aside, and got behind the wheel myself. Only five minutes later, with a crash, my rig shuddered to a stop: I had blown its differential. After a short tow to the nearest garage in the nearest town (Del Rio, Texas), I swapped stories with the all-Latino garage crew, some of whom had spent time in California. When they saw my 14-foot aluminum skiff on the truck roof, complete with old “Lake Success, Tulare County” stickers, they told me they used to live in Tulare, California, and *snuck* into Yosemite National Park to poach deer. They also thought they knew where another rear end that would fit my truck might be.

So the next day we went over the border to assay an abandoned, stripped, ¾ ton Chevy truck lying on its roof in the Mexican desert. It had the same 8-lug bolt pattern as mine, both axles turned just fine, and, after

popping both brake drums, it revealed decent brake shoes. “So, how much to pull mine, and dump this one in, *Mis Cuates?*” Total cost: \$250.00—the special rate for *simpatico*, Spanish-speaking archaeologists, which would have been *double* for run-of the mill, up-tight Gringos. We dragged the carcass across the little railroad flatcar bridge over the Rio Grande into the U.S. of A., yanked out my old rear end, dropped in the one from the Mexican donor truck, and I was on my way out of the Lone Star State back to L.A. after only a 36-hour delay. Each time I returned to the ‘States from Central America I would visit the UCLA garage, where my pickup was legendary amongst its all-Latino employees. I had much more in common with these Chevy aficionados than I did with some of my fellow faculty members at UCLA.¹⁵

Back home in California, during one of the 80+ extended field archaeology classes I taught for the California Department of Forestry (CDF) all over the state, I was leading a convoy of about 25 RPF (Registered Professional Foresters) and CDF pickup trucks down the narrow, twisty, two-lane blacktop perched above the Noyo River in Mendocino County. A sheer drop of around 500 feet down into the gorge was to my right,



Figure 40 (Top Left): Out with the old, in with the new. Engine number one (or was it two?) on its way out, after more than 300,000 very hard miles. **Figure 41 (Bottom Left):** Engine number 3 (or was it 4?) a crate motor bought for less than 1/10th the cost of a new truck in 1994, and good for at least another 300,000 miles. **Figure 42 (Top Right):** Two years later, we make the jump to Hyperspace by dumping the old two-barrel carburetor/manifold, and replacing them with four-barrel units, tuned for more top-end speed, horsepower, and better constant-speed gas mileage. All the new parts sit on a card table next to my truck. **Figure 43 (Bottom Right):** the new, 4-Barrel manifold installed, awaiting carburetor and other externals in 1996. All four photos by Dillon, taken in my San Fernando Valley, California, driveway (Figure 23:1).

while an endless procession of overloaded log trucks, heading uphill, was to my left. And then I lost my brakes. The student beside me in the truck turned white as a ghost as I turned off the ignition, then proceeded to crash shift down into one lower gear after another, trying to stop my 3-ton bomb from catapulting over the side of the narrow road. Finally, on a hairpin curve, a tiny, 8-foot wide shoulder appeared, and I threw my front wheels towards the oncoming log trucks and crash-shifted into granny low, stalling the truck and finally bringing it to a stop. One of my flexible rubber front wheel brake lines, after 500,000 miles of constant flexing, had broken in two, and all of my brake fluid had

drained out. So after fixing my old bomb by the side of the road, my class resumed. Once back in L.A., I replaced the flimsy stock rubber units with custom-made, bullet-proof, braided steel brake lines.

All of us Cowboys of Science say that when your pickup truck breaks down in the dark, in the rain, in the middle of a free-fire zone, if you can't fix it yourself with junk you find by the side of the road, you shouldn't be driving it in the first place. The corollary, of course, is that if you cannot drive your own rig to your own research location and keep it running, then you should probably *get the hell out of archaeology* and find something less demanding to do with your life.



*What do archaeologists do on their weekends off? They take the Boy Scouts camping, hiking, or exploring. In addition to 40 years as an archaeological field vehicle, my 50-year-old, Million-mile Chevy was also the “go-to” vehicle for hundreds of Boy Scouts on campouts, hikes, and camporees all over California for many years. **Figure 44:** a very young John Dillon, future Eagle Scout and Los Angeles Corral Branding Iron Editor, works on his Boy Scout Auto Mechanics Merit Badge in 2002, using my (“New”) 1970 Chevy pickup as a willing victim. My old truck, a 1957 Ranchero, at right. This hot rod pickup, with tail fins, is on an extended (20-year) vacation in my driveway (Figure 23: 1). Dillon photo.*

What Cowboys of Science do on Our Weekends Off

If historians, on their day off, go to libraries or museums never previously visited, then we cowboys of science tend to jump back in our pickup trucks and drive our sons and their friends, invariably Boy Scouts, off to prehistoric rock art sites, pristine crater lakes inside dormant volcanoes, or crumbling adobe forts out in the desert. Our field vehicles, perfectly set up both for long-distance travel, and for grunting around off road, are also ideal Boy Scout support vehicles on these “archaeological days off.” Big adventures might be 1400 miles round-trip for our San Fernando Valley Boy Scouts for their 50-mile hike through the forests of Siskiyou County up to Medicine Lake Volcano (Figure 45). Only slightly less ambitious would be the 500-mile round trip venture out to Death Valley for a 50-mile bike ride down through the desert and over to the Nevada state line and then back again (Figure 46).

Conclusion

After 40+ years of doing archaeology in four different countries with my venerable old pickup truck, it is beat-up but still both younger, and in better physical shape, than I am. “Why do you drive down there? Why don’t you just fly?” Is a question I am often asked by people whose exposure to “archaeology” is limited to TV shows with “Mystery of...” in their titles. “What an incredibly stupid question!” is the answer I must grit my teeth to keep from responding with. At minimum, if you fly down, you don’t have your truck there when you arrive. And, for the price of a single air ticket you can buy enough gas to get your entire crew down and back, plus haul them around for your entire field season. All archaeologists know that gear needed for excavation, surveying, photography and mapping, from picks and shovels to alidades and plane tables and portable generators and computers, must be hauled down or you must do without. Your



Figure 45 (Left): My San Fernando Valley Boy Scout Troop on a 50 mile hike in Siskiyou County 700 miles from home (Figure 23:3) with my Chevy truck as support vehicle. **Figure 46: (Right):** My Boy Scout Troop beginning a winter 50-mile bike ride from the snowy high country above Death Valley, Inyo County, California. My old truck has pulled the trailer carrying all of the bikes, and all of the camping gear, on this 500-mile round trip. Destination: the Nevada State line, 50 miles away and 4,000 feet lower in elevation. Both Dillon photos.

pickup truck is also your commissary, your safety deposit box, your toolbox, your ambulance, and, periodically, your dormitory. You also need your truck to haul your artifacts and samples off your site to your lab and, ultimately, to the museum where they will be permanently housed. Finally, your truck is also the escape pod that can save your bacon if things go wrong south of the border in case of fire, flood, famine, revolution, etc.

Cowboys and Indians may only now exist in the U.S. of A. as *Tinseltown* fantasies, up on the big, or down on the small, screen. Both, however, are still alive and well in Central America in refreshingly real, non-fictional, contexts. In Southern Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras the *Indians* are also the *Cowboys*, and the vehicles they drive, when they have vehicles, are pickup trucks. As a Gringo archaeologist, a *Cowboy of Science*, I am frequently the only *huero* (“paleface” in Central American slang) swimming in an otherwise all AmerIndian sea.

So, to return to a question posed at the beginning of this opus, are historians different from archaeologists? *Quién es Más Macho?* No contest: red-blooded *Cowboys of Science* drive *pickup trucks* while historians and, for that matter, most other lesser mortals, merely drive *cars*.

Notes

1. *“Cowboys of Science:”* Dillon, 2016; 2019a.
2. *Malaria:* Despite taking atabrine, aralen, and chloroquin for many years, I contracted malaria in Guatemala in 1977. For the next twenty years I suffered attacks around six months apart, and then a single, annual, attack for another ten years. The prophylaxis doesn’t keep you from getting malaria, it just keeps you from dying from it.
3. *Jail:* In 1974, in the Guatemalan Highlands, I was put in jail for self-protection from an anti-Gringo lynch mob.
4. *Keeping Your Students Out of Jail:* In 1981 a college student who had ridden through five different countries in my truck next to me admitted, only as we were about to go through immigration at our final port of entry, that she had a *drug arrest record* in that country. She hoped that nobody might compare her passport *too closely* against the printed list (this was long before computers at border crossings) of “do not admit” *personas criminales*.
5. *Off to the Hospital:* No matter how often you caution college kids to *be careful* you will eventually encounter a *California urban idiot* who won’t listen to you. One such victim of a self-inflicted wound (he sliced his forearm to the bone sharpening his machete *exactly* the way I told him *not* to) did himself in only minutes after we had unloaded my pickup and set up a temporary field camp. So now

my Boy Scout First Aid training kicked in: direct pressure on the wound (spurting bright red arterial blood); knock down the camp; toss everything in the truck, and drive at top speed to the nearest clinic (50 km away by dirt road). There the first question the cop on duty at the door asked was “O.K., which one of you Gringos chopped up your buddy?” The next day I had to drive into a second country, and then up into a third, just to put the wounded kid on a plane, and send him back to the ‘States.

6. **Operating on Your Crew:** One of my Indian workmen, in 1978, unaccustomed to the bot fly larvae that all of us in my field camp were unwilling hosts to, instead of ejecting them, managed to kill them while they were still tucked away under his epidermis. His infected leg swelled up to twice its normal size; he became feverish, and he could no longer work nor even walk. So I administered a general anesthetic (*Rón Botrán*) and went to work on his leg with an X-acto knife. An explosion of pus and worm parts immediately relieved the pressure. After a liberal dose of antibiotics and two days of bed (well, actually, *hammock*) rest, back to work he went.
7. **Ending up in a Shallow Grave:** A very close friend and age-mate of mine, a geologist, not an archaeologist, was taken out of his truck at a Guatemalan jungle road block and murdered. His abandoned pickup was found, but his body never was, and to this day we do not know if he was killed by the Army or by Guerillas.
8. **The Archaeological Field Vehicle:** Dillon 1982; 1989; 1993.
9. **Letters of Introduction:** For Latin American field research these typically have a passport-sized photo of you in coat and tie at top center, and a gold seal embossed with the University logo at bottom. Dangling blue ribbons are optional. They are your ticket through road-blocks, your shield and only protection from life-threatening situations in free-fire zones. These were termed “Dago Dazzlers” by Robert F. Heizer (1915-1979) one of my U.C. Berkeley professors who was cordially disliked and distrusted by both grad students and Latin Americans alike.
10. **Lazy:** most Gringos cannot comprehend the standard Latin American rural workday.

Those cute little ceramic figurines of Mexicans in serapes taking siestas against cactuses represent people who, like all archaeologists, must get up at 4 A.M. to get the campfire going and cook breakfast in the dark. This is so that the hike out to the dig can be made at the crack of dawn, a little before 6 A.M., so that the hardest work of the day can be finished before it gets so hot (100 degrees F) and humid (100%), inevitably by around noon, that your body ceases to function. For some reason, North American college students don’t like to get up at 4 A.M. and start working. Consequently, for many years on Central American archaeological projects I encouraged them to rise and shine by tossing lit packs of firecrackers under their cots, to the great amusement of my all-Indian labor crew, every one of whom had *already* been up since 2 A.M., and was wondering what was wrong with those lazy young Gringos.

11. **DOA Archaeology Students:** Despite 45+ years of field projects in four different countries, including disease-ridden Central American free-fire zones, I have never lost a student. No idle boast, for three of my archaeologist friends, have each, in fact, “lost students” to accidental death (drowning, electrocution, valley fever, getting run over by a freight train, etc.) while doing field archaeology. One of them, in fact, lost a “newbie” on the very first day of his field season, another had not one, but two different students depart archaeology for the graveyard.
12. **Crooked Cops:** One day while driving through Mexico City in my Chevy I was stopped five times by five crooked cops in succession during a single hour, and had money extorted from me each time (Dillon 2019b).
13. **Archaeological Field Camps:** one camp my archaeological field class students built and lived in Ventura County, California, was raided by INS agents, who were sic’ed on us by paranoid yuppies from the “white flight” town of Thousand Oaks. These timid, ethnocentric souls periodically jogged through my camp in day-glo spandex before driving off to work in their BMWs. *La Migra* was surprised that the inhabitants of my little, temporary, shanty town were *not* illegal aliens, but UCLA students, and that its “Mayor” was a

U.C. Berkeley Ph.D. archaeologist: me.

14. *Bringing Home the Bacon*: while a Fulbright Fellow in the Guatemalan rain forest in 1977-78, for 13 continuous months I fed my field camp, of never less than five, but sometimes up to nine persons, with what I could shoot during the daily hike out to my archaeological site, or I could pull out of the nearby river, or harvest from plantings made during previous years. We lived as hunters and gatherers while we did archaeology.
15. *Ivory Tower Academics*: one of my fellow UCLA Anthropology faculty members specialized in the cross-cultural measurement of doorway widths (no, I am not kidding) while another attempted to push computer programming as an equivalent to spoken human languages. Anthropologists, by definition, are students of humankind, and as a minimal requirement for the Ph.D. we must be proficient in at least three different languages. But this lunatic argued that we should stop talking to *people*, and start talking to *machines*, instead. Sorry, I don't agree: as a patriotic *Cowboy of Science* I will continue to drive *machines*, and talk to *people*.

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Dedicated to the memory of *mi cuate*, the Million-Mile Chevy's *Padrino*, the late Andy Florez (1945-2020).

California's License Plates: A Personal Journey Through a Colorful History

Abraham Hoffman

As a young teacher at Hollenbeck Junior High School in the 1960s I thought it would be interesting if students in my 8th grade U.S. History class would seek out items of historic interest to decorate the classroom. The kids brought in such items as a very old radio that worked intermittently and a plaster souvenir of the 1932 Olympiad. But what surprised me was the number of old license plates they brought to my classroom. Ultimately there was a set of license plates hanging above the bulletin board and the chalkboard, running consecutively from 1919 to 1955.

The year 1955 was a pivotal one for license plates. Until that year, the State of California issued new plates annually to

owners of motor vehicles. These were mailed to vehicle owners in January. Owners were responsible for taking off the old license plates and replacing them with the new ones. Then came the question of what to do with the old plates. Only a year old, they seemed to look just as nice as the new ones. The answer for many people: nail them to the garage wall.

Boyle Heights is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Los Angeles, dating to its founding in 1874. Many of the houses in the neighborhood were built in the 1920s to accommodate the city's growing population, 576,000 in 1920 and more than a million by 1930. As homes were sold and sellers moved



Early California license plates were issued annually, and with a different color scheme each year. **Figure 47 (Left):** A blue-on-white license plate from 1922. **Figure 48: (Right):** A gold-on-red license plate from 1927. Both sets of plates are from a 1918 Dodge Brothers Tourer owned by the Dillon family, beginning in 1922. Both Dillon collection.

to other parts of the city, people moved into the houses, bringing in their own furniture and household items. As far as I can tell, few bothered to take down the license plates that were nailed to the garage wall. There they stayed, ignored (except for putting up the old plates when the new ones arrived each year) until the children who were in my U.S. History class realized the plates had historic value—and would get extra credit from me for bringing them to the classroom.

During World War II metal became a vital resource for the war effort. Between 1942 and 1945 the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), instead of issuing full-sized plates, mailed out a small tag that could be attached to the existing plate. In 1955 the DMV made some major decisions about the plates. One was to issue an annual sticker to be stuck on the upper right-hand corner of the plate on the rear of the vehicle. A different color sticker each year made it easy for the police to see that someone's plate was no longer valid. On the left side of the plate a sticker was placed that stayed there every year—the month in which the plate was issued.

The DMV also decided to issue the stickers for the plates to be the date the vehicle was purchased. This plan ended the crunch of work that had license plates going out to everyone in January. The "month" sticker remained on the plate; the "year" sticker changed annually. I would imagine it was someone at the DMV who came up with the

idea of changing the color of the registration sticker every year, making it easy for the police to spot a car with an expired license.

Anyone wishing to put a personal frame around the license plate, removing the auto dealer's frame, had to unscrew it, remove it, and then maneuver the plate back on the car through the two of the four holes on the plate (which two depends on how the plate is mounted on a particular car). Until 1956 there was no standardization between carmakers in license plate mounting hole locations, so car owners often had to drill holes into the bumpers to accommodate the bolts. That year the Automobile Manufacturers Association worked out an agreement with the federal government to standardize the size of the plates issued by all the different states, and for all carmakers to set the holes the same distance as the bolts on the bumper. In recent years most cars have attached the plates to the trunk lid.

It was also in 1956 that the DMV discontinued the old random number/letter system. It replaced it with three numbers and three letters, e.g., ABC 123. The DMV also tinkered with the plate colors, putting gold numbers on a black background from 1963 to 1969. Subsequently the background and number colors have been changed from black to blue to white.

California's growing population, and the increasing number of motor vehicles, resulted in the DMV going from a six-digit format



More color changes. **Figure 49 (Top):** 1930 introduced a black-on-gold license plate. **Figure 50: (Above):** The following year, the colors were flipped to a gold-on-black design that would become familiar to all Californians of the first postwar generation. The “PT” on this plate stands for “Private Truck.” Both Dillon collection.

to seven digits, starting with 1, e.g., 1ABC 123. When the total number of cars exceeded the possible combinations, a new number was added, e.g., 2ABC 123. More tinkering resulted in a 1982 white plate with blue letters/numbers or numbers/letters, including an optional sun graphic behind the word CALIFORNIA. The DMV discontinued the sun graphic in 1987.

At some point personalized or vanity plates, officially called Special Interest License Plates, made their appearance, giving vehicle owners the opportunity to tantalize drivers behind other cars trying to guess what the plate’s letters meant. I personalized my plate with CLIO PHD. Being a history teacher, I used Clio, the muse of history, and Ph.D., the degree I had earned at UCLA after a lot of hard work. In 1987 I attended the

annual Western History Conference being held in Los Angeles, with the Biltmore Hotel hosting the event. I drove my car to a nearby parking lot where the attendant wrote my license number (actually, letters) on the ticket stub.

“CLIO PHD,” he remarked as he wrote the letters. “You must have a Ph.D in history.”

Now, many people have asked me what the letters on my plate meant, including not a few historians. And here was a parking lot attendant, speaking with a heavy Spanish accent, who knew what it meant. When I asked him about this, he replied, “When I went to school in Mexico, I received a very good education.”

Another personal incident involved an encounter between my license plate and the Metro police. At the time, I was teaching evening classes at Los Angeles Valley College and taking the Orange Line to work, parking my car at the Canoga Station lot. Coming back to the Canoga Station after class around 10:30 p.m., I saw a ticket on the windshield. I couldn’t make head or tail out of it. I was parked correctly between the lines. What was wrong?

The next morning, I went to the local Auto Club office and a clerk looked up the law specified on the ticket. “It says you have an illegal license plate.”

“What! What’s illegal about it?”

“According to the law, your plate isn’t reflective,” he said. “How long have you had this plate?”

“Since around 1982.”

The clerk advised me to go to the nearby California Highway Patrol office and have them inspect the plate. I went there and the officer asked me when I had ordered the plate.

“Around 1982.”

The officer laughed and said it was a “bogus” ticket issued by a Metro officer who didn’t know the law. The State had ordered the plates to be reflective around 1991 so that police officers could more easily read a plate at night. Owners such as me who had a personal plate prior to that year were grandfathered in. The Metro officer who wrote the

ticket should have been aware that many personalized plates, transferred from one car to another over the years, predated the law. The CHP officer had a mechanical stamper and stamped "INVALID" on the ticket and signed off on it. He advised me to mail it in with a check for \$10 (the fine was \$25) and an explanation about why my personal plate was exempt from the law.

I wrote the letter, expressing my contempt for the Metro officer in his ignorance of the law, and sent it in with my \$10 check for which I expected to be reimbursed. The Metro judge didn't refund my money or return the check.

If it wasn't non-reflective plates that would cause a problem, the DMV had other issues to deal with, namely excluding applications for personalized plates that were inappropriate, obscene, or, shall we say, nasty innuendoes. "JAPTIN" was an example of a rejected application as insulting if not overtly racist, even if the vehicle wasn't a Toyota or Nissan. "NIPTIN" was also rejected for the same reason, even though the applicant's surname was Niptin!

The DMV has a panel with people who are expert in slang and foreign languages to reject applications that are offensive. Rejected examples: UPURAZZ, claimed by the applicant as meaning "Upper Arizona," didn't fool the panel. Neither did FKYOUZ where the applicant said the letters stood for "Find the kid in you two." Or RXFOR SX, the claim being "Prescription for Success" got a rejection. A Washington Redskins fan applied for RDSKN57 was turned down because it seemed more racist than football.

However, the panel wasn't paying attention when the personalized plate I ordered for my wife's car was approved.

My wife has been a fan of the TV soap opera *Days of Our Lives* for more than forty years, and she subscribes to *Soap Opera Digest* to get the latest gossip on who is getting divorced or accused of murder. The magazine uses acronyms for the last surviving soap opera shows, GH for *General Hospital*, OLT for *One Life to Live*, and, for *Days of Our Lives*, DOOL. For her birthday I ordered a plate that read I [HEART] DOOL, the heart symbol

being one of the options an applicant could put on a new plate.

The new plates arrived and I put them on her car. Not long afterward she drove to a gas station and was pumping the unleaded into the tank when a man, doing the same with his car, started laughing and in a foreign accent asked her, "Do you know what DOOL means?" He drove away before she could ask him why he was laughing so hard. All he said was, "It's Farsi!"

At that time my wife was teaching pre-K and one of the teachers at the school was from Iran. My wife asked her what DOOL meant in Farsi. The teacher was shocked and, in a whisper told my wife what it meant. My wife came home and told me that it translated to a man's unmentionables. I immediately ordered a much less controversial plate. We still laugh about it.

In recent years the DMV, possibly atoning for the long lines of people forced to wait for hours at the DMV offices, has become very imaginative in creating thematic specialty plates for an extra charge. Decorated plate subjects include Lake Tahoe, Yosemite, kids, veterans, pets, Snoopy, breast cancer awareness, and UCLA (the only university at this writing to be so honored—sorry USC fans). The extra cost for the plates goes to the special interest organizations that sponsor the plates.

Finally, this article has focused on passenger automobile license plates. The DMV also issues license plates for motorcycles, trucks and other commercial vehicles, amateur radio (Ham) plates, trailers, RVs, etc. And, lest it not be overlooked, the DMV provides instruction booklets in many languages for prospective drivers to study up on California law when seeking a driver's license. Add to this, handicapped and other placards, vehicle registration, and recently, voter registration. All of which somewhat explains those long lines and wait times at the DMV offices. Lots of websites, incidentally, offer future research into this fascinating topic.

Down the Western Book Trail . . .

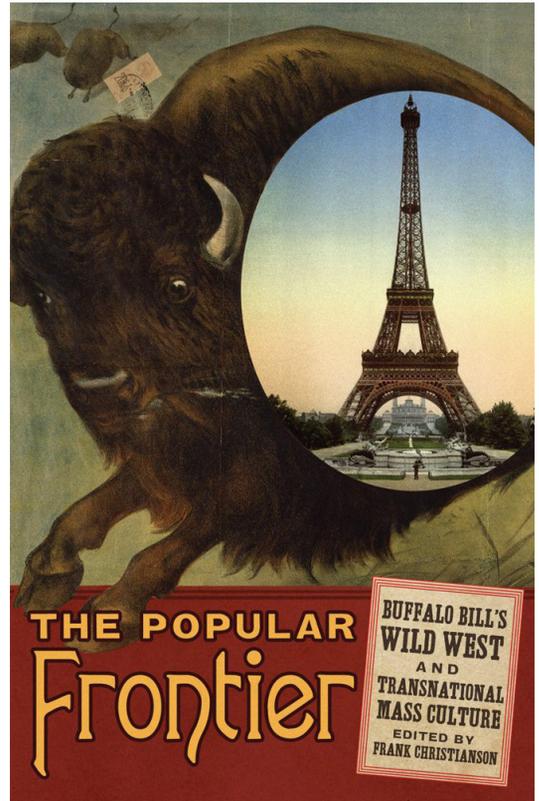
THE POPULAR FRONTIER: Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Transnational Mass Culture, edited by Frank Christianson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017, 252pp. Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index and a Contributors section. Hardbound, dust jacket. \$32.95. Sponsored by the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, and part of the William F. Cody series on the history and culture of the American West.

This is an anthology of nine articles by nine authors, all related to the internationally travelling, Buffalo Bill Wild West show, in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Included is a forward, prologue, introduction, and an epilogue. All nine articles are around 20 pages each, concise, and focused. Each has its own extensive endnotes which facilitate further study. The book contains an extensive 19-page bibliography. There are only a few illustrations, all of them black and white. The contributors section has a short paragraph on each person who wrote any part of this book detailing their credentials.

Christianson neatly introduces, summarizes and ties all the articles together in his prologue and introduction. While academic in nature, it is a good read and friendly to both laymen and students of Buffalo Bill, Wild West entertainment, and United States Western history. Christianson explains that although Buffalo Bill's Wild West European touring show was a business venture, it was also bound into political and cultural contexts.

Europeans were interested in America and to some, this period was the American century, the time when America became a world power (soon to become a superpower). The West was America's national identity. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show was more than a show in Europe, it shaped mass culture and defined American nationalism. It became a discourse on exceptionalism converging with European economies and cultural foundations.

The nine articles cover how an



international exhibition operates in the context of peace and war, gender and celebrity status in an international context, and William Cody and Theodore Roosevelt. Two articles are on Annie Oakley, one relating to gender politics of the time, the other on how her performances were viewed in the media. Also included are chapters on the visual culture in political posters of 1890s Paris, an article on the Wild West Show in Germany, one in Barcelona, Spain, and a final article about the show in Italy and its effect on Mussolini and his own myth-making and fascist propaganda. This book is not a complete history of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and everywhere it went. Rather, it is a discussion of certain aspects of the show. It provides insights into explaining the show as a transnational phenomenon and as an ongoing project of American national definition.

Discussed is the paradoxical blend of celebrity artificiality and authenticity, and of

fiction versus reality: for example, American “masculinity” versus French “effeminacy,” or the British “aesthete” versus the American “frontiersman.” The Wild West show was distinctly American. Further suggested is that the Wild West show prepared the way for Theodore Roosevelt’s later 1910 speaking tour. Roosevelt was the cowboy President, the political personification of the mythical American West, the rugged individualist and the representative of American frontier exceptionalism.

My favorite chapter was the one on Annie Oakley entitled, “Don’t Forget This.” It is a detailed description of her life in the Wild West Show, her performances, her career, how she reinvented the “New Girl” and the “New Woman” in the Victorian era, her athleticism, her playfulness, her innocence,

and her marksmanship. For me, she had greatness on several levels.

The German tour of 1890 article was clearly written and interesting. It also suggests American culture had a receptive audience since the Germans appreciated and adapted to the underlying message of the Wild West Show spectacle, that is, “Manifest Destiny,” sanitizing of the past, and justifying conquest.

This book is a good study of what Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show represented—America’s mentality at the time, and the meaning of the American Frontier. It leads to an understanding of our Western narrative as it spread across the globe, and gives a deeper understanding of what we are today.

— Joseph Cavallo

***Branding Iron* Issue 300—Coming Soon!**



The Branding Iron is working hard to bring you fresh reading material during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. For more things for you to read, we can use your help!

The Fall 2020 *Branding Iron*, scheduled for publication in December, will be our 300th issue. It also comes on the eve of the Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners’ 75th anniversary! So, it is only fitting that we celebrate this occasion with a commemorative edition. All Westerners are invited to share their memories of the Corral or write about its members and history. If you have any good stories, feel free to share!

To be considered for publication, please submit your articles by November 15th. Please observe a minimum article length of a half page. Illustrations are welcome and encouraged.

For submissions and inquiries, please contact *Branding Iron* editor John Dillon at John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com. Thank you all, and Happy Trails!

Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners Brand Book 24



Just Published! Order Now!

Brand Book 24, edited by Brian Dervin Dillon, is entitled *Aloha, Amigos! The Richard H. Dillon Memorial Volume*. Dick Dillon (1924-2016) was a world-famous western historian, librarian, teacher, and public speaker. He was the author of dozens of prize-winning full-length books, hundreds of articles, and more than a thousand book reviews. A 4th generation Californian and WWII WIA combat veteran, Dick Dillon was a member of the Los Angeles and the San Francisco Corrals and became Westerners International Living Legend No. 46 in 2003. *Aloha Amigos* incorporates a biography of RHD, culture-historical studies and paeans by his friends and admirers, and a comprehensive bibliography of his published works. Contributors from four different WI corrals include Will Bagley, Peter Blodgett, John Boessenecker, Matthew Boxt, Phil Brigandi, Robert Chandler, David Dary, James Delgado, Brian Dervin Dillon, Lynn Downey, Abraham Hoffman, Gary Kurutz, Valerie Sherer Mathes, James Shuttleworth, and Francis J. Weber. Foreword by Kevin Starr, cover art by Tommy Killion. Price for Westerners International members is \$25.00, plus \$5.00 for U.S. shipping. Price for all others is \$35.00, plus a \$5.00 shipping charge for U.S. orders. Please make your check out to *Westerners, Los Angeles Corral*, and send your order, with return address, to P.O. Box 1891, San Gabriel, CA, 91778. For more information, contact BB 24 Editor Brian D. Dillon at briandervindillon@gmail.com.