



Figure 1: Sarah Leekya carvings, clockwise from top: jet bear, amber eagle, serpentine wolf, true Sleeping Beauty turquoise classic eagle, Kingman turquoise frog. Brito photo.

Master Carver Sarah Leekya and the Zuni Reservation

By Frank J. Brito

In the mid-1980s, my wife and I began traveling on a frequent basis to Las Cruces, New Mexico. We visited and interviewed my Uncle Santiago Brito, recorded family history and did genealogical research in Southwestern universities, libraries and government archives.

After a few trips, we tired of the same Interstate 10 route through the deserts of Southern California and Arizona and began traveling north on I-25 to Albuquerque, then

west on I-40 either back to Los Angeles to visit family or through Tehachapi Pass back home to Northern California. This northern east-west route passed by many Indian Pueblos and we would often detour to spend a few days in Santa Fe, Taos and Gallup.

We became interested in the Zuni Reservation, about 40 miles south of Gallup because of its rich history. Here was the 1540 battle with conquistador Vázquez de

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The Branding Iron

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Editor's Corner . . .

Summer 2022 marked one of the hottest summers on record, but that has not stopped *The Branding Iron* from running the presses hot to deliver this issue No. 307. Enjoy our lead article by Frank Brito, as he explores the Zuni reservation and the work of master fetish carver, Sarah Leekya. Next, Brian Dillon recounts tales of teenaged and pre-teenaged “mudsliding” down logging roads in disposable clunkers. Don’t try this at home, folks!

Miss a Westerners meeting? Experience our Fandango and Roundups vicariously through summaries written by Gary Turner, yours truly, and Alan Griffin.

Next, if you’re searching for new reading material for your shelves, you’re in luck! Check out a trio of Western history book reviews by Abraham Hoffman, Arkaz Vardanyan, and Tom Connolly.

Many thanks to the wonderful contributors who make *The Branding Iron* a read we all enjoy. It really can’t be done without you! If you would like to share your Western knowledge or experiences in a future publication, feel free to contact me with your ideas for articles.

John Dillon
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Figure 2: Frank Brito at Háwikuh Pueblo ruins, 1991. Brito photo.

Coronado, the Háwikuh Pueblo archaeological site and the 1539 death of Estevánico, the Spaniard Dorantes' African slave. Before continuing, it should be said that the Pueblo name is "Zuni," but the people call themselves "A:shiwi." The colon denotes a long vowel sound.

We found Zuni had many shops and museum displays filled with small stone carvings, commonly called "fetishes." Prehistoric and early historic versions of these stylized figurines of animals such as foxes, bears and eagles, were used as power talismans. In religious ceremonies each clan had their own versions made by clan members. Some of the powers attributed to fetishes were to enhance hunting, farming, curing, gaming, prowess in war, fertility, and other pursuits.

One fetish animal may have several applications. As one small example in a broad and complex array, the following can be observed: The mountain lion is the god of the north. The bear, the west. The badger, the south. The wolf, the east. The eagle, above. The mole, below. This belief matrix includes fetish variations in colors, wishes and dif-

fering measures of power to achieve a goal. Other animal species may be symbolized and the fetishes themselves are not gods, but represent the animals that are venerated. Animal carvings are only one type of fetish and there are many others such as miwi (corn), ettowe (reed bundle), concretions (naturally formed objects) and masks. Others are known only to the Zuni priesthood. Further, to be effective, most carved fetishes must live in a container and be fed. As can be conjectured, it is impossible for either the casual or serious non-Zuni collector to be an expert on Zuni fetishism or hope to invoke their power.

My wife Lois became interested in these modern Zuni animal carvings. After visiting all the shops, she found one had the best selection because of quality of workmanship, beauty, prominent carving families, and the knowledge of the clerks. She began collecting the best examples and was soon able to identify most artists by their style, animal preference, choice of stone, and other distinguishing characteristics. Lois also purchased books on the carvings to educate herself on the history, designs, artists and types of

stones used, including turquoise.

Lois was quickly drawn to one artist's singular work that she admired. The clerk at the store where the fetishes were sold said the artist's name was Sarah Leekya. The extended Leekya Family had other artists engaged in this craft and we learned that Sarah's carving legacy was impressive, obtained by intensive study and practice through an apprenticeship with her father. During one early visit and familiar with Lois's preferences, the clerk pointed out that a woman working in a small room was, in fact, the carver Sarah, and asked Lois if she would like to meet her. Lois said, "Yes," and we both walked over to her work bench.

Sarah was very soft-spoken, polite, and had a very sweet and engaging disposition. Lois told her how much she enjoyed her work and saw that Sarah's current project was patiently stringing her own exquisitely shaped turquoise disks for a heishi necklace. This was a surprisingly slow process because each small turquoise disk was a slightly different size. The dozens of disks were strung by their relative dimensions going first from large to small, then repeating on the other side. Making these tiny discs from stone in graduated sizes was incredibly skillful and time-consuming.

Over time and many semi-annual visits, Lois began a friendship with Sarah. At each meeting, we would take her to lunch in Gallup. I was mostly an observer and listener, but often asked questions. Cautious at first because of a bad transaction as a teen with an Anglo visitor, she developed a trusting relationship with us. Growing up culturally as part of an A:shiwi's teen years, tribal females in Sarah's generation engaged in various defined maturity rituals. One of the tasks was to make and decorate a large clay water jar in a traditional Zuni manner. The jar was part of a ceremony in which she had to dance with the jar balanced atop her head. A few months after completing the beautiful jar, an Anglo visitor offered Sarah \$50 for the item, which she naively agreed to and did not realize the value was many times this amount. She said she had been careful dealing with outsiders ever since and longed for the jar's return.

Unfortunately, this wish was never fulfilled.

As the years went by, we took Sarah to the Acoma Reservation for visits, Window Rock on the Navajo Reservation, the Gallup Flea Market and the museum at Red Rocks State Park, among other places. She allowed me to photograph her and to videotape the visit to Window Rock. This was an intriguing visit because Navajo and Zuni are hereditary enemies. The former were Athabaskan nomads; the latter are a Pueblo agrarian people. Zuni does not allow photos or videos on their reservation without permission and many tribal members do not like photographs taken of themselves under any circumstances. On our drives and stops, Sarah would point out plants and flowers used in Zuni foods, ceremonies, and medicines.

On one visit, I asked if she had ever been to Háwikuh. It is an extremely important pueblo ruin on the Zuni Reservation and has deep historical meaning to all Pueblo tribes. The brutal fight with Spaniards and their allies on the battlefield near this abandoned pueblo signaled the end of Pueblo peoples' independence and the beginning of European contact, culture, and disease. Here Coronado's army defeated the A:shiwi, killed and abused them, stole their food and clothing just before winter. Then the conquistadors began their trek across New Mexico, mistreating and robbing other Pueblo Natives during particularly harsh and cold weather in their search for treasure.

Sarah did not drive and said she had been to Háwikuh only once several years earlier, but did not recall much. She was enthused about going and while there, she solemnly appreciated the visit, though only large mounds of pueblo construction rubble and broken pottery remained. It is a place accessible behind a low hill via a rutted dirt road. When looking southwest across the plain, Coronado's route is visible and an overwhelming sadness weighed heavily on this observer. Words cannot describe the tragedy of such vast cultural destruction that began at Háwikuh, one of the supposed Seven Cities of Cibola. The Spaniards later built a church there but after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, the Háwikuh people abandoned the site and

joined their tribal relatives at Halona:wa, the central pueblo on the Zuni River.

Sarah said her father had worked at the Háwikuh ruins and I made a mental note to look into this remark. We also visited the Zuni Sacred Spring a few miles away, which she had never seen. Driving south through the old tribal farming pueblo of Ojo Caliente (Warm Spring) and around a large loop adjacent to a reservoir, then north a short distance, we found the remarkable gated and fenced pool of crystal-clear water that bubbles up from the sandy bottom. A few prayer sticks were planted around the perimeter of the spring. The pool is about 10 feet in diameter and Sarah said it is their belief that a plumed serpent travels underground between the spring and the reservoir. The prayer sticks are petitions to tribal members' gods.

Arriving home, I followed up with some research and found that Leekya Deyuse (1889-1996), Sarah's father, worked on a crew for the eminent archaeologist, Frederick Webb Hodge (1864-1956). He employed several tribal members to excavate Háwikuh in the 1920s. Leekya Deyuse unearthed many ancient fetishes and began carving his own, emulating what he uncovered, and selling them to tourists. He felt carving exact copies was disrespectful, and therefore slightly altered his creations to what he felt were acceptable facsimiles. His creations were all hand-carved and polished, long before Dremel moto-tools were invented.

As a youngster, Sarah took up his art and continued her efforts in a small workroom at the front of her home. Museums, especially the renowned Heard Museum in Phoenix, have displayed both Leekya Deyuse's and Sarah Leekya's carvings and their silver artwork. Lois is fortunate to have acquired some of her creations, including a necklace. Sarah was generous and gave me a beautiful silver and turquoise ring made by her brother, Robert. Sarah and her siblings took her father's first name as their last name. The Leekya family descendants are still engaged in artwork of one kind or another. Never vain about her own work, she advised Lois on the merits of collecting other carving families' works. With years of experience, she was an

expert on Zuni Reservation art.

A:shiwi are believed by some to have made trading pilgrimages to the Pacific Coast and the Sea of Cortez for coral and shells such as abalone. These items have been found in Southwest ruins including Zuni through archaeological excavations. The A:shiwi, Hopi, and other tribes along the Rio Grande used the same long-established trail for trading. Abalone nacre is especially desirable to current artisans and over the years we provided several shells to Sarah given to us by a neighbor diver. The Zuni language is unique, an "isolate," and unrelated to other Puebloan languages.¹ It is not in danger of being lost as it is spoken in nearly all Zuni homes as the preferred language between tribal members.

On one occasion, we were in Sarah's home getting ready to leave for lunch in Gallup. Asking to use her bathroom, she gave me directions through the house. An explanation is required about her unusual home. She lived in a large house built of big hand-hewn stone blocks. About 40 feet adjacent to the right or east, was another similar house where her sister Elizabeth and nieces lived. Sarah lived alone and I supposed her sister's house had the bathroom I needed. Connecting the houses was a large windowless annex acting as a pass-through. I left her house, walked through the middle structure and found the bathroom in the other home.

While passing through this large middle hall, I noticed there were drums, feathers, masks, ceremonial objects, and seats along the sides of the walls. It was a meeting room of some kind and when I returned, I asked Sarah, "Did I just walk through your kiva?" She laughed and said, "Yes, you're not supposed to be in there." Sarah was of the Parrot Clan and I was dumbfounded, apologized and thought I had committed a grave offense but she was unconcerned and said, "Oh, don't worry." Kivas are ancient places of clan worship, highly religious structures meant only for the tribal members of the various clans. They are found throughout the Southwest in Pueblo communities and are forbidden to outsiders. Some kivas are underground, some above ground, some are round, some square, many are accessible only by ladders,



Figure 3: Sarah Leekya inside the Pueblo Trading Post, Zuni, New Mexico, with one of her fetishes. Brito archives.

but all are of spiritual importance. Having Puebloan ancestors myself, I felt privileged and humbled to be allowed inside.

Sarah always informed us of clan dances or ceremonies. On several instances, she notified us of times, locations and the purpose of a dance, ceremony or blessing. Busy with her work, she only occasionally accompanied us, but her directions were precise. We would drive to a certain spot, park, and wait. This is difficult to describe, but quite suddenly, from around corners, out of doorways and narrow passageways, dancers would appear in beautiful costumes with masks, headdresses, and drums, and begin chanting or singing. To us, some of the chants were mystical and the masks often had an ominous aspect. The dancers would perform for several minutes, and then quite suddenly be absorbed back into the background from which they emerged. Visitors are cautioned that there are to be no photographs, videotaping, sound recording, drawing or any kind of manual reproduction of the ceremony. Applause and clapping are deemed offensive. These dances are not considered performances, but religious ceremonies or rituals. Violators attempting to record these events are subject to arrest, confinement, and confiscation of their recording

equipment. Observers must be quiet, remain still, and not approach the dancers.

Occasionally, the dancers appeared on the streets. All motorists stopped, turned off their engines, and emerged to silently watch the dancers. Only after the dancers finished and disappeared did the spectators resume their pedestrian or automobile travels. The spectators were 99% Zuni, and only a very few outside visitors were fortunate enough to watch these ceremonies which commenced abruptly and with precision. Lois and I were once directed by Sarah to a suburb of modern homes for a house blessing ceremony. These dancers were intimidating with their masks and their eyes inside seemed to stare at only us during the ceremony. The outdoor dancers seemingly are always men and their low voice chants accompanied by the fearsome masks triggered the "fight or flight" response in me, but we remained rigidly quiet. Turquoise blue is a prominent color in the Zuni masks and costumes. Sarah was a good informant on these ceremonials and they remain memorable events.

On one extraordinary opportunity, she asked us to accompany her to a series of dances, all held indoors within walking distance of her home. It was an autumn



Figure 4: Sarah Leekya heishi necklace. Brito photo.

Zuni holy day and we were invited inside a meeting room as the only non-tribal visitors in attendance. The performers were female and this hall was like a classroom with the chairs around the perimeter against the walls. The dancers wore beautiful costumes and the synchronized chanting and stomping were very loud. At the end as they filed out the door, each dancer passed by a small niche with a statuette of Jesus, bowed their head, blew into their hand and released the breath in front of the image. As the last dancer passed by, each audience member arose from their perimeter seat and followed the dancers, repeated the hand and breath gesture. We were invited to be the last in line. It was one of the most moving events we were privileged to participate in. We later learned that the statuette was from the 18th-century abandoned Catholic mission and represented the likeness of the Holy Infant of Our Lady of Atocha. It is understood that breathing upon or inhaling from fetishes acquires their power. That day, there was a series of three indoor dances and we walked to each in turn. A few A:shiwi are Catholics, but most are not and follow the Zuni religion. However, the A:shiwi have incorporated some Catholic rituals into their native religion, perhaps hold-over hybrid rites descended from appeasing the missionary priests centuries earlier.

An example of Sarah's special standing

occurred during an evening dance in the main (Halona:wa) Zuni Plaza. The plaza is a small square surrounded by very old multi-story pueblo houses. The ground floor pueblo windows look directly onto the dancers and performances. One late afternoon, Sarah said that there would be a dance in half an hour and we could walk over and she would join us later. Lois and I lined up quietly against a wall and enjoyed the spectacle for several minutes. Dances are preceded by a clowning routine composed of "Mud Men." These individuals wear comical clay masks and their pudgy bodies are coated in brown dried mud. We were told they say and do the most rude, impolite, and satiric routines before the primary serious ritual dances. Of course, all this in the Zuni language generated much laughter. The A:shiwi are a kind and polite people, but the Mud Men give the tribe free reign to express the tribal members' innermost grievances and repressed thoughts. At the end of the Mud Men ritual, a young tribal member walked over and said, "You would be more comfortable sitting on the roof." The houses surrounding the square have roofs with seating for tribal audiences to sit and view the dances. We were waiting for Sarah, so we declined. The youngster left, but returned and repeated his suggestion.

A few minutes later, an older tribal member came over and said, "If you don't go on



Figure 5: Sarah Leekya (left) and Lois Brito (right) at Red Rock State Park in 2002. Brito photo.

the roof, you will have to leave." We misunderstood the young man's invitation and did not realize it was an imperative. We walked back to Sarah's house told her what happened and she said, "They kicked you out? Come with me." We returned to the plaza and walked into the front door of one of the pueblo houses facing the plaza and took a seat at a large window directly facing the ceremonies. I asked Sarah if this was OK and she said, "Of course; this is my nephew's house and they can't say anything." The tribal member that evicted us looked into the window and gave us a puzzled stare when he saw Sarah, Lois, and me enjoying the ceremony from inside the house. This position was better than the spot from which we had been evicted. We were unhappy to have offended these kind people by being in a prohibited area.

In March 1992, my cousin Tommy Ryan, his wife Connie, Lois, and I were having lunch at El Torito, a Mexican Restaurant in Silver City, New Mexico. Tommy was then Chief of Police in that city and we were chatting when New Mexico Attorney General Tom Udall arrived for lunch. He knew Tommy and walked over to say hello. Tommy introduced everyone and asked Mr. Udall to join

us. He sat for several minutes asking who we were, etc., but departed when the group he was meeting arrived.

In August that same year, Lois and I attended the annual Zuni Festival. Sarah had invited us in March and said many non-religious or social dances were performed along with a big concluding parade. Sarah said we could videotape only the parade. I asked her if my camera would be confiscated. She said, "Not if you sit with me." We enjoyed the tribal dances, then followed her to a location on the parade route. We carried folding chairs to a perfect shady spot and began to watch the parade. I videotaped the procession of cars and dancers and nothing was said because of her senior standing in the Zuni Tribe. Soon, a convertible drove by slowly carrying Tom Udall. He looked at Lois and me and recognized us when we smiled, waved and shouted, "Hi, Tom!" He had a look of utter confusion likely wondering why we were sitting in Zuni among their citizens with no other outsiders around. He continued to look back at us perplexed as his car proceeded in the parade. We found this very humorous and told Sarah the story of our earlier visit with Mr. Udall in March. She had a good laugh

over this.

On a later occasion, Sarah told us the Hopi Reservation was hosting the “Butterfly Dance” in two days. We told her we were leaving for home the next day and she said, “They only have this dance every few years and it’s special.” Lois and I agreed to spend another day in Gallup and left early for the Hopi mesas the morning of the dance. We drove to the top of the mesa on a narrow road without barriers and parked. I asked a huge Hopi policeman if it was OK to park in a particular spot and if outsiders could attend the dance. He said, “Yes, it’s OK; at least that’s what they tell me.” We were directed to the plaza seating and Lois and I waited for the dancers. They soon emerged and we viewed the most amazingly colorful dance performed by young Hopi women. It lasted over an hour and we were pleased and privileged to see this rare performance.

During a several-year period, Lois was incapable of travel due to medical problems and we missed our regular visits. In 2015, on a camping trip to Chaco Canyon with friends, I stopped at Zuni to say hello to Sarah, but she was not home. I talked to her niece and left some large containers of Sarah’s favorite Asian tea that Lois asked me to deliver. Sarah had a fondness for jasmine, Oolong, and other teas and we would buy them in large bags from Bay Area Asian grocery stores for her enjoyment. Lois resumed her visits to Zuni in 2017 when we again stopped at Sarah’s home to deliver tea. We visited with her niece and were crushed to learn Sarah had passed away just a few months before. It was a very sad day for us because she was a very warm and sweet friend. We continue to stay in touch with Sarah’s family and will always have fond memories of this kind, gifted, and special person.

Note

1. *Zuni Linguistics*: One fringe theory is that the Zuni language is distantly related to Japanese. Although not accepted by anthropologists, it has contributed to a steady trickle of Japanese tourists visiting Zuni.

Recommended Reading

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1990 *Fetish Carvers of Zuni*, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, Albuquerque.
- Smith, Watson, Richard B Woodbury, and Nathalie F. S. Woodbury
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Figure 6: One of my favorite California wrecking yards, still essentially frozen in time. It is very similar to the ones I remember from more than 50 years ago in Northern California, all of them now unfortunately extinct. This is a small part of the wonderful Pearsonville Wrecking Yard near Inyokern, California, showing some of the late 1940s and early 1950s GM products there, with Oldsmobiles predominating. Image courtesy of the Classic Oldsmobiles Web Page.

Mudsliders

Brian Dervin Dillon

Introduction

The American Boy's Handy Book by Daniel Carter Beard was first published in 1882, and quickly became a best-seller.¹ In 441 pages it explained to youngsters old enough to read how to make everything from blow-guns and darts to a figure-4 deadfall trap. It was written with the assumption that every red-blooded American boy seldom spent any time indoors: that was something that *girls*, not *boys*, did. This essential volume, exactly a quarter-century later, became the inspiration for the creation of the Boy Scouts, first in Great Britain (1907) and then, three years later, in the United States (1910).² To celebrate the hundredth anniversary of this remarkable book's publication, a new facsimile edition was issued, with a humorous foreword by Noel Perrin:³

Before about 1915, boyhood was seen by most grown-ups as a state of natural savagery. A boy of ten or twelve had more in common with wild Indians than

he did with his own parents. He probably even had more in common with his dog. Later he would change, of course... But now, and for some years to come, he was going to think like a savage. That automatically placed him in a state of war with civilization, as represented by his parents and his sister.

Natural savagery could be, and was, seen both as good and as bad. In early New England, it tended to be seen as bad. A boy's will was something to be broken, as one breaks a horse... But in the rest of America... an unbroken boy was usually seen as good... best of all, they were free... Huckleberry Finn...⁴ was an exaggeration of a real thing. There were millions of American boys somewhat like him... resourceful, adventurous, not much interested in school, very interested in wild places. "Savage," after all, derives from the Latin *silvaticus*, "pertaining to the woods."⁵ They came home to have supper and to sleep; they more or less grudgingly did a few household chores.

But all day long, if they could manage it, they were paddling on the river or up in tree houses, living happily...⁶

To this idyllic and nostalgic look back at American boyhood, a much more recent chapter can be added. Beginning in the 1950s, we little Northern California savages were the freest of the free. Far from Eastern cities and innocent of their anti-social urban behavioral norms, we not only paddled up rivers and built tree-houses, but also went *mudsliding*.

Long ago, and far-away, in the vanished and all-but-forgotten savage land of postwar Northern California, every one of us male children was car-crazy. Everybody counted down the minutes until our sixteenth birthday. For on that day, trembling with anticipation, we trooped down to the Department of Motor Vehicles, took our driving test, and received our very first driver's license. Most of us had already been driving illegally for up to four years before that landmark birthday. And all of us, while enrolled in High School "Driver's Ed" classes, had been driving for at least a year "quasi-legally" with an instructor in the shotgun seat next to us. But now, with that all-important piece of paper in hand, on the way home from the DMV we were finally "legal."

I "drove" my first car when I was 10 years old. It was a Ford Model A Town Sedan being towed off to the town dump at the end of a very long, thick rope. The old beater had been stripped of usable parts for a neighbor's hot rod, a '29 "A" convertible running on '32 rails, and powered by a late 1950s small block Chevy V8. The old sedan's steering worked just fine, but only one rear wheel's brake drum responded to the hand-brake, the only means I had of stopping the rolling wreck. I could barely see over the windshield, for the seats were a distant memory, and my perch was a wooden milk crate nailed to the floorboards, topped with a ripped and ratty old pillow.

Everybody I grew up with in Northern California back in the 'fifties and early 'sixties began learning how to drive by the time they were 12. Only late bloomers did so by

the advanced age of 13. The process usually started many years before, through sitting next to mom or dad on long trips, and "steering" the car from the middle seat while the parent worked the gas, clutch and brake pedals, and the gearshift. Even younger kids "steered" the family sedan or station wagon by sitting on mom or dad's lap, with two hands inside dad's on the steering wheel.

After a couple of years of this, you were ready to "solo" with Mom or Dad on the seat beside you, either in deserted Sunday morning supermarket parking lots or in flat, grassy fields, with no livestock or rock outcrops. Popping the clutch, stalling the engine, and grinding the gears were all part of learning how to start and stop at very low speed. Eventually, after several teeth-clenching weekends far from any other moving vehicles, you were promoted to actual driving on little-traveled backwoods two-lane black-top roads. Here you could go up through the gears, learn how to downshift on hills, back up into imaginary parking places, and so forth and so on.

If you started your driving attempts at age 12, usually by the time you were 14 you had mastered the lonesome road senior honors course and were itching to beg, borrow, or buy your own first car.⁷ Farm and ranch kids in California could legally drive at age 14, but only for family-sanctioned jobs. Those of us kids not domiciled on farms or ranches thought this grossly unfair, and pestered our parents unmercifully to do something, anything, to correct this intolerable situation.

My own folks, tired of telling me that no, I couldn't drive at age 12, in a stroke of genius lamented that there was nothing they could do to change the state law making me wait four long years to get my license and "become legal," but there was no law against me "driving" a motorboat. So I built an 8-foot dinghy in my 7th grade Sausalito wood shop class, bought a very tired used outboard motor for \$25.00, and took to the water instead of the highways. Fixing that ancient two-stroke outboard motor on a daily basis, field-striping it out on San Francisco Bay, pulling the flywheel and steel-wooling its contact surfaces while wind and tide pushed me towards



Figure 7: An ideal mudslider candidate, a dinged-up 1948 Chevrolet six-cylinder, four-door sedan with a very tired 85 HP engine. With a too-big, too-heavy body and too-small motor for used car buyers in the early 1960s, thousands of these still-running cars were exiled to boneyards. Courtesy of the Classic Cars Web Page.

the Golden Gate and oblivion, gave me a rudimentary knowledge of internal combustion engines and how to fix them. From there it was a very short step to four-stroke engines. Before too long I was running a 5hp lawnmower engine in a 1906 Springcycle (an ancient motorcycle whose frame was made of leaf-springs). Then by age 15, I had rebuilt my first car motor, a twin-cam, hemi-headed, long-stroke, high-compression, 1951 British four-banger that I could start with a hand-crank after pre-setting its ignition.

A Junker-Rich Environment

There were only two essential requirements for mudsliding: 1: dirt-cheap old beater automobiles on their very last legs, and 2: logging roads unpatrolled by local law enforcement officers and unvisited by their absentee landowners. Roads used for mudsliding were usually visited beforehand and selected for their gentle grades, surrounding standing timber (effectively screening our

activities from onlookers), but most importantly for their surface condition. Dirt roads that foresters kept passable for log trucks hauling cut timber to local sawmills were preferred over those interrupted by wash-outs or ending in seasonal lakes.⁸

Sixty to seventy years ago American youngsters were “car rich” but “cash poor.” Old clunkers were so common and so comparatively cheap that you could encounter them abandoned almost anywhere. At age eight I found an ancient, late 1940s Buick four-door straight-eight around the bend from Fort Baker, within rock-throwing distance of the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge. Some G.I., who had been given his marching orders, and saddled with a barely-running car he couldn’t take with him, had pushed it off the road shoulder “over the side.” Gravity then took it the rest of the way on its final journey downslope to the Pacific Ocean. A year later, at age nine, I used to play inside a Ford Model A coupe abandoned in the middle of a field, with vegetation so tall

around it you had to tunnel through it on hands and knees to reach the old relic.

Back when Eisenhower was in the White House, American rich kids with lots of bucks burning holes in their pockets entered their "spare" hot rods in demolition derbies. While racing them they intentionally collided with competitors on small-town dirt-oval racetracks, often with "collision X's" running diagonally through them, in front of cheering spectators. Poor kids, on the other hand, went *mudsliding* with geriatric vehicles bought for a fraction of what the souped-up demo-derby hot rods cost.

In the late 1950s and into the early 1960s, old, heavy, and underpowered cars from the late 1940s and early '50s were both plentiful and very, very cheap. They were perfect candidates for use as mudsliders out in the woods, then abandonment wherever they died. You could buy just about anything that was not considered "hot-roddable" (i.e., four-door sedans or station wagons, invariably with straight-six engines) in decent shape for \$250.00 to \$400.00. The same cars with body damage (Figure 7) noisy gears in their transmissions, slipping clutches or leaking radiators, however, would only bring \$50.00 or even less.⁹ On the other hand, hot-roddable two-door coupes or convertibles, especially those with V8 engines, like 1949-54 Flathead Fords or Mercurys, or the first generation (1955-57) small-block V8 Chevys, went for twice the amount that the four-door six-cylinder cars cost: \$500 to \$800. These were too expensive for use as mudsliders, and, in any case, would never be intentionally damaged nor destroyed, but converted into hot rods if the money was available for "souping them up."

For example, a 1946-48 Plymouth P-15 four-door sedan, one of the homeliest American cars ever built, was only offered with a 218 CID straight-six engine, optimistically rated at 95 HP, and a three-speed manual transmission. Brand new, they sold for between \$1,124.00 and \$1,765.00, but ten years later you were lucky if you could get \$400 bucks for one in very good shape when selling it used. Many were still running in 1960, but nobody wanted them, and they

couldn't even be given away by used car dealers forced to take them as "trade ins" on new cars. So off to the wrecking yards they went, especially if they had body damage or tired engines. Bought by boneyard owners sometimes for as little as ten or twelve dollars, they were then sold to kids for twenty-five or thirty bucks.

Even less desirable were "orphans," discontinued vehicles made ten or twenty years earlier by car companies that had subsequently gone out of business. Such cars were detested by used car dealers since by the early 1960s nobody wanted Nashes (which company died in 1954), Hudsons (gave up the ghost in 1957), DeSotos (extinct by 1960), Packards (which company went west in 1956), and, last of all Studebakers (which company expired in 1963). So when such cars were traded in, they also tended to go straight to the wrecking yard, where, even if running, they were sold for bottom dollar.

Perhaps the most common old cars used as mudsliders in the early 1960s were the ubiquitous, "whale-bodied" and underpowered six-cylinder Chevrolet 4-door sedans (Figure 7). The venerable Chevy "stovebolt six" engine was introduced in 1929 and powered all Chevrolet passenger cars, with only minor changes and improvements, until the small block V8 became available in 1955. In the late 1930s the 216 CID Chevy straight-six motor put out 85 HP but in 1941 higher compression raised it to 90 HP. Finally, by 1954 a 261 CID version of the "small Chevy six" cranked out almost 150 HP.¹⁰

Long ago in the late 1950s when the "horsepower wars" were just getting started, brand-new American cars, even those with V8 engines, cost between \$2,000.00 and \$3,000.00. So by 1962 or '63 in the Pacific Northwest, barely-running junkers with very tired engines, or chipped gears in their three-speed transmissions, or with broken windshields, stove-in doors, and/or mushrooms growing in their back carpets, typically went for \$25 to \$40. These junkers were parked just inside the gates of one boondocks wrecking yard after another, sporting "make offer" signs held down by windshield wipers. Most had come from dealers discounting the cost

of new cars by offering a trade in allowance of a couple hundred bucks, "reducing" an already-inflated sticker price. They sold these eyesores to local boneyards for only five or ten dollars as fast as they could. They did this to get them off their lots, eliminating distractions from the sale of new cars. And the people that bought these unwanted derelicts from the wrecking yards were kids, more often than not, sometimes months or even years before they could legally drive them.

Making Every Penny Count

In order to buy a mudslider four or five kids would pool their resources, each one putting five or ten bucks into the "kitty" so as to buy that 1949 Studebaker four-door (which end is the front, anyway?) with the leaking radiator, or that 1952 Pontiac straight-eight with the blown head gasket and two dead cylinders. Only one kid out of any gang of potential mudsliders had to be of legal driving age to make the purchase. What usually clinched the sale at the local wrecking yard was two things: bald tires that still had good (meaning non-leaking) inner tubes and at least a half a tank of gas.¹¹

Any old beater at the wrecking yard that still had good rubber (tread on its tires) might go for twice the cost of one sitting on bald tires with the cord showing. So tires could make the difference between an affordable \$25 car and a too-expensive \$50 one. Another trick by which the final price could be lowered by a few bucks was swapping a "good" spare for a fifth bald tire that would still hold air. And, if the battery was good (would hold a charge) you could once again force the purchase price down by swapping it for one that wouldn't hold a charge overnight, but still barely functioned while the generator was turning. In any case, all such beaters were stick-shift vehicles, so any time they stopped dead everybody would get out and push-start them while the driver popped the clutch.

You always tried to buy a car from the boneyard on a Friday afternoon, when the true knights of the junkyard, eager for beer money, were most likely to take any offer. If

you got the '49 Studebaker with the leaking radiator you pulled the thermostat housing, took out the thermostat and threw it away. Then you bolted the now-empty housing back on and put a few teaspoons of oatmeal in the cold radiator. You ran the engine until the water was hot, and the leak was effectively (albeit temporarily) plugged by the newly-expanded oatmeal. If you bought the big, ugly '52 Pontiac four-door straight-eight you couldn't fix its blown head-gasket without spending money. That engine, of 269 CID, essentially unchanged since its introduction in 1933, only put out 130 horsepower on its very best day. By 1955, when all major American manufacturers had switched to V8 engines, the old straight-eight was as out-of-date as the Brontosaurus. But with a straight-eight, even with two dead cylinders (typically the innermost), the car would still run (badly, and very noisily) powered by the outer six. Despite the imbalance, the backfiring, and the miserable mileage, you were no worse off than if you were driving a car with a very high-mileage (200 to 300 thousand miles) straight-six engine.

Off to the Boondocks

Now you tossed a shovel, an axe, a crow-bar, a bicycle pump, and a couple of rolls of old carpet in your trunk and waited for the next rainy Sunday morning (the time and weather selected to cut down on unwanted observers). At the appointed time, H-hour of D-Day, everybody piled into the boneyard beater and headed off to the woods. Your mudslider was followed by a "chase" car, usually borrowed from mom and dad, with or without their permission. You parked this getaway car somewhere where it would not attract attention, yet (hopefully) still be within walking distance of anyplace your mudslider might die during its final trip to automotive Valhalla.

And now the fun began. Huck Finn may have had his raft, but we had our Studebaker four-door. We raced up and down the muddy logging roads, spraying dirt and mud in all directions. Each kid who had plunked down a part of the purchase price got a turn



Figure 8: A view of the “cockpit” of a modern example of a typical mudslider from sixty years ago, a 1947 DeSoto Deluxe with “au natural” upholstery. Image courtesy of the Barn Finds Web Page.

behind the wheel. Every time you got stuck in a mud hole, you got out and drained it with a little shovel work, then pushed the car onto your twin strips of old carpet brought along to make temporary roadways.

As you slipped and slid up and down hills you invariably began to clobber those trees just a little too close to your dirt track. Despite these glancing blows, momentum usually kept you going, unless you lost control and hit a forest giant head on. Such collisions might push your radiator back over the still-turning fan, or pinch and immobilize a front wheel with a stove-in fender. When the latter happened, you just got out and pulled or crow-barred the fender away from the tire, or simply chopped as much of the sheet metal away as necessary with your axe, and continued on your merry way. If you destroyed your radiator, you also just kept on going, seeing how long it would take before your engine seized up or blew its head off up into the underside of the hood or a piston down through the oil pan into the mud. When the

first tire blew, you kept on going, then you also ignored the inevitable second blowout. When all four went you kept driving as far as you could, until you sank into the mud on the rims.

Once any of these forms of automotive mortality occurred, you got out and hiked back to your “backup” car, leaving your mudslider where it died. But first you covered your tracks, by pulling the plates and removing any identifying documents from the steering column (where everybody used to keep their registration inside a long, coil spring-secured isinglass patent leather “window”) or from inside the glovebox.

You always left all four doors open, but left the hood down to protect whatever remained of the engine, as if it were a metaphorical coffin lid. Smearing peanut butter on the dashboard and front and back seats just prior to abandonment was a common practice. If you were lucky, this would attract an adult male bear with a highly-developed olfactory sense from miles away. Better yet,

a mama bear with cubs might take up residence inside. More prosaic woodland critters making a home of your abandoned Studebaker might be raccoons, or, best of all, an entire family of porcupines.

Come the next logging season, long-suffering foresters would have to evict the bears, raccoons, or porcupines from their finely upholstered (Figure 8) anthropogenic home. Then they had to haul the abandoned car off to whatever ravine needed filling preparatory to the extension of new logging roads into uncut stands of timber scheduled for felling during next year's timber harvest. Although most foresters, loggers, and log truck drivers grumbled something like, "Those damned kids! Here we go again, another hump-backed Nash abandoned in the middle of my haul road!" there was still a closer connection between the teenaged mudsliders and the grown-ups trying to make their living out in the woods than either group had with effete, "civilized" city-dwellers back East, where mudsliding was completely unknown.

Conclusion

Long ago and far away, and not in this jurisdiction, teenagers and sometimes even pre-teens in the Pacific Northwest engaged in a form of solo backwoods demolition derby *sans* spectators. Here the collisions, both accidental and intentional, were with standing trees and rock outcrops, not other cars. "Winning" was a function of distance and endurance through these western forests, not of beating other drivers (more akin to hamsters running on endless wheels) on demoderby oval tracks. And few of us red-blooded gasoline jockeys racing through the timber were older than 18.

Mudsliding was perhaps more common in Northern California, owing to the greater numbers of serviceable automotive candidates in wrecking yards there, than in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, or British Columbia. This unique post-war quasi-legal activity was nevertheless present wherever the local economy was dependent upon logging. Unknown in Southern California, the sport was endemic for about a quarter-century throughout the

Sierra Nevada foothills, the Cascade Ranges of California's "empty quarter" in its far northeast, and in the fog-shrouded timberlands of the North Coast Ranges as far south as Mendocino, Sonoma, and even Northern Marin Counties.

And, if truth be told, more than a few foresters, loggers, and log-haulers of my acquaintance, from Northern California up through Oregon, Washington and into southern British Columbia, evolved from savage young Mudsliders into adult Timber Beasts. Now long of tooth and grey of beard, they very happily still spend their days out in the same spectacular Western American forests they used to motor through back when both they, and the world, were young.

Notes

1. *Daniel Carter Beard*: "Uncle Dan" Beard (1850-1941) more than any other man was instrumental in the creation of the world scouting movement in 1907, and the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. Beard's *Handy Book for Boys* (1882) in slimmed-down, updated fashion, became the model for the earliest versions of the *Boy Scout Handbook*, both in Britain and America. Beard himself edited *Boys Life Magazine*, the official monthly publication of the Boy Scouts of America, during its earliest years of existence.
2. *The Boy Scouts*: were founded by Robert Baden-Powell in England in 1907, mostly as a means of correcting the shocking and fatal unpreparedness the average slum-bred British soldier had demonstrated in the Boer War (1899-1903) recently concluded in South Africa. Baden-Powell had emerged as quite possibly the *only* British hero of that war, and his inspiration for the British scouting movement was Beard's 1882 "how to" book. My own family has been involved in scouting for four generations. My grandfather, W.T. Dillon (1869-1938) was an adult advisor to the League of the Cross Cadets, a quasi-military Catholic youth organization that seamlessly morphed into the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. And, after World War I, he helped build the Mill Valley, California, Scout Hall, the new home of the second-oldest Boy

Scout Troop (founded in 1910) in the United States. Grandpa Dillon was also indirectly responsible for the formation of the British Boy Scouts. As an Irish-American volunteer fighting alongside Boers in South Africa, he was one of the cavalymen shooting at Baden-Powell, propelling that British officer to military prominence in 1899-1900. The following generation, my Uncle Jack (1915-2001) was a founding member of Sea Scout Troop No. 1, Sausalito, in the 1920s. He sailed his 40-foot U.S. Navy surplus whaleboat out through the Golden Gate long before the Bridge was built. And my own father (1924-2016) was a Sausalito Cub Scout. I joined the Scouts at age 8 in 1961, and went to meetings in the same Scout Hall my grandfather built in my home town. Then, a generation later, I became a scoutmaster and helped 19 scouts in my troop earn their Eagle rank. My own son, the 4th generation Dillon family Boy Scout, earned his Eagle at age 16. And yes, while there is indeed an *Auto Mechanics* merit badge (which, not coincidentally, I have taught to many scouts) there is no *Mudslider* merit badge.

3. **Noel Perrin:** was a professor of English at Dartmouth College but much more famous as an historian and cultural commentator. Perrin (1927-2004), a decorated Korean War Veteran, wrote books, magazine and newspaper articles, and won many literary and academic awards.
4. **Huckleberry Finn:** Mark Twain's (1885) immortal character was modeled after an older boy in Hannibal Missouri, but much of his ingenuity and know-how was inspired by D.C. Beard's (1882) "how to" book for boys, published two years before the British edition of Huck Finn, and three years before the American edition.
5. **Savagery vs Civilization:** In modern American usage, these remain terms of approval or disapproval, frequently with racial overtones. 19th-century vernacular references to "savages" almost always referred to AmerIndians, while "civilized" people were invariably the white pioneers confronting them. 19th-century British proto-anthropologists even tried to "classify" cultures around the world as "savage," "barbaric," or "civilized," depending upon how similar

or dissimilar they were to the upper-crust, pinky-out, tea-slurping Anglo-Saxon Ivory Tower analysts studying them. Conversely, 20th-century American anthropologists discarded "savage" and "barbaric" as descriptive terms because both are too negative and subjective. "Civilized" remains in use, but only in its original, objective definition, meaning "city-dweller," the same as "urbanized." So, by this yardstick, all of us feral kids running (and, for that matter, *driving*) through the Northern California woods sixty years ago were proud to be "savages" (i.e., of the forest). We pitied and scorned "civilized" Easterners as lesser beings, trapped in their self-made, claustrophobic, urban prisons of cement, steel, brick, and asphalt.

6. **Resourceful, Adventurous, American Boys:** Perrin 1983: iii-v.
7. **First Car:** Like many car-crazy Northern California teenagers I bought my own first vehicle (a British Lea-Francis 1951 right-hand-drive "woody" station-wagon) long before I was legally able to drive. I paid for it with money earned (29 bucks a month) from delivering newspapers from my bicycle beginning at age 12. Because car ownership had been forbidden by my parents, I kept it a secret from them, and hid the car behind the Sausalito Heliport, down on the San Francisco Bay mudflats, for more than a year until I finally turned 16 and "came clean."
8. **California Sawmills:** Shortly after the catastrophic 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire there were an estimated 600 sawmills operating in California. Fifty years later, around the time of the present narrative, there were still more than a hundred going strong in the Golden State, all but a few of them in Northern California. Today, there are only six (6) active sawmills in California, and just about every old logging road is now gated and posted, inaccessible to any potential modern-day mudslider.
9. **Dirt Cheap Used Cars:** As late as 1972, a four-door 1955 Chevy straight-six sedan was bought as the Dillon family's second car for only \$350.00. Two years earlier, in 1970, I paid \$100.00 for my own second car, a 1962 Austin Healey Sprite, which I drove for ten years, but had to fix every weekend.

10. **Six-Cylinder Chevys:** After more than 30 years of producing its "small" six-cylinder engine almost unchanged, Chevrolet came up with a "big six" engine in 1963. Intended mostly for use in its trucks, it was a 292 CID. This six-banger had a larger displacement than its contemporary Ford (260 then 289) and Chevrolet (265 then 283) small-block V8 engines but only cranked out 165 HP at its highest revs. The 292 six, however, was a stump-pulling torque monster, more suited to tractors than highway cruisers. It was the perfect motor for low-gear grunting around on dirt roads, or for pulling heavy loads. I had one in my 1964 Chevy Pickup truck, bored out to 300 inches, running headers and "twice pipes" (dual exhausts) just like any other hot rod.
11. **Gas in the Tank:** In the early 1960s a gallon of regular gas cost only 25 cents. Nevertheless, any kid with any kind of job was lucky if he

was pulling down \$1.25 to \$1.50 an hour. Consequently you bought a mudslider without ever thinking of putting gas in its tank, and looked for one already featuring at least a half a tank of go-juice.

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Congratulations to our Los Angeles Corral winners of the following Westerners International 2021 competitions:

1. **Best Large WI Corral of 2021:** Los Angeles Corral
2. **Philip A. Danielson Award for Best Presentation of 2021:** Brian Dervin Dillon,
Early Chapters in Southern California History
(Sponsored by the Huntington Corral)
3. **Fred Olds Poetry Award, 1st Place for 2021:** Paul McClure,
Tragic Heroes of Los Angeles History: A Poem by Pablo
4. **Coke Wood Award for Best Monograph of 2021, 3rd Place:** Abraham Hoffman,
An Actor's Life, William S. Hart: 1864-1946
5. **Co-Founders Best Book, 3rd Place for 2021:** Brian Dervin Dillon,
Early Chapters in Southern California History

Fandango, June 11, 2022 . . .



Deputy Sheriff John Shea and his wife Ann made all the arrangements and set in motion another excellent Los Angeles Corral of Westerners Fandango, 2022. On June 11, the members of the corral who were not down with the latest COVID virus, met for the annual Fandango at *Adobe de Palomares* in Pomona. The Ygnacio Palomares Adobe is a one-story adobe brick structure built between 1850 and 1855 as a residence for Don Ygnacio Palomares. It was abandoned in the 1880s and left to the elements until it was acquired by the City of Pomona in the 1930s. In 1939, the structure was restored as a joint project of the City of Pomona, the Historical Society of Pomona Valley and the Works Project Administration. Since 1940, it has been open to the public as a museum dedicated to life in the Spanish and Mexican *ranchos*. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971.

The Ygnacio Palomares Adobe was once the center of the sprawling 22,000 acre *Rancho San José*. Mexican Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado granted the land to Ygnacio Palomares and Ricardo Vejar, both *Californio*

sons of New Spain natives. Palomares built a 13-room home, the present-day Palomares Adobe. The house represents the blending of Mexican adobe construction and American styles, with a wood-shake roof and milled-wood flooring on the adobe structure.

Besides a tour of the house, a fabulous catered meal was provided for those in attendance. Arriving early to help set up the picnic tables and grounds were John Shea, Gary and Vicki Turner, and Keeper of the Chips, Dr. Dennis Thompson. Supervising the set-up was Ann Shea, under whose direction the table cloths were set up, napkins and plates arranged, and basic organizational needs handled. It might be noted that the Deputy Sheriff did his due diligence and followed direction well. A special "Thank You" goes out to Ann (and John) for their hard work!

Many Westerners were pleasantly surprised to find this 'hidden' gem of historical significance right in middle of Pomona. It certainly gave everyone in attendance a cause to reflect on the early days of California and return to a time when Southern California was largely unsettled and space was widely available. It has been 150-plus years since the historic structure was built, but returning to the past gave Corral members a view of our California history and California roots. A more appropriate place for a Fandango would be hard to find.

All the Westerners who were in attendance had a wonderful afternoon. There was time to meet with friends, walk the grounds of the museum and the rancho, partake of a beverage or two from Bartender Turner, and relax in a historic atmosphere. The day ended too soon as the clean-up crew (the same as the set-up crew) did their job and returned the grounds to what they had been in the 1850s (or at least to what they were before Corral members arrived). Thanks again to John and Ann Shea for a great afternoon!

— Gary Turner



Previous Page: The covered well of Palomares Adobe. Public domain internet photo. Above Left: Alice Gomez, curator of the museum, gives a guided tour to guests. Above Right: The master bedroom of the Palomares Adobe. Both photos by Joseph Cavallo.

Monthly Roundup . . .

July 13, 2022

Dennis Thompson

July’s Roundup had Denny Thompson take us out on a history of Dodger Stadium. We enjoyed complimentary peanuts and Cracker Jack, but it was hard to root, root, root for the home team as Denny recounted the murky circumstances surrounding the Dodgers’ acquisition of the stadium site—the once vibrant community of Chavez Ravine.

City councilman Julián Chávez purchased the rugged ravine in 1844. From its



beginnings, Chavez Ravine was a refuge for many peoples. In the 1850s, it hosted a “Pest House” for Chinese and Mexican smallpox victims. Jewish-Americans settled the ravine in the 1860s, but were forced to relocate their cemetery to make room for oil derricks. By 1900, the area was largely Latino, closely knit, and civically engaged. Denny’s own father and grandparents lived in the Ravine at this time, between 1907 and 1922, before

winning a dairy farm in Santa Clarita in a poker game. Chavez Ravine residents won a victory against the oil companies in 1926, when the city council banned industry there. However, the community could not resist the next challenges to its integrity.

After WW2, city authorities designated Chavez Ravine a “blighted” neighborhood in need of redevelopment. In 1949, the new Los Angeles Housing Authority secured federal funding to build a public housing project on the site. Utilizing eminent domain, the city purchased the land for \$10,300 per property. Homeowners felt pressured to accept this price, which dropped if they held out. As consolation, all former residents were promised preferential placement in the proposed housing project upon completion.

Yet by the early 1950s, a specter haunted Los Angeles—the specter of *communism*. At least, that is how it was seen through the red-tinted lens of McCarthyite paranoia. Several prominent “Citizens Against Socialistic Housing,” including then-actor Ronald Reagan, successfully pushed for a referendum that killed the Chavez Ravine housing project in 1952. However, Los Angeles had signed a housing contract with the U.S. government, and in 1954 the Feds only agreed to resell the property to the city for \$1.3 million on condition the land be used for “a public purpose.”

For 22-year-old city councilwoman Roz Wyman, that purpose was obvious. Los Angeles was a “Big League town” without a Big League baseball team, and needed one badly. Fortuitously for her, the Brooklyn

Dodgers were an A-grade team with a D-grade home stadium. Wyman encouraged the Dodgers to move to L.A. in 1957, and team owner Walter O’Malley purchased Chavez Ravine from the city for \$494,000 in order to build a new stadium. A 1958 ballot initiative to block the purchase narrowly failed, partly due to wording that confused voters.

Sheriffs forcibly evicted the last remaining ten families from Chavez Ravine on May 9th, 1959, a day called “Black Friday” by some. Photos of the Archiga family being dragged out of their home made national headlines, but public sympathy diminished with the revelation that the family owned other properties elsewhere in L.A. Construction of Dodger Stadium was completed in 1962, to the tune of \$20 million. The human cost was the exile of a thousand families from Chavez Ravine, the result of broken promises. No alternative public housing project was ever offered. These families were scattered all across Los Angeles, with many members having to split up as dictated by the availability of jobs and housing. The Dodgers, meanwhile, took two decades to find acceptance among Latino *Angelesños*, but the recruiting of Mexican southpaw pitcher Fernando Valenzuela finally broke the ice in 1980.

The community of Chavez Ravine is now a fading memory, but their story is a timeless one concerning questions of eminent domain, public housing, and “public purpose” private property. Many thanks to Denny Thompson for this fascinating discussion.

— John Dillon





August 10, 2022

Jillian Moore

In August, the Westerners welcomed Jillian Moore to the Corral. The Wyoming native, and Ph.D. candidate in English at Duquesne University, spoke of subjects related to her forthcoming dissertation. Her talk, entitled “Selling the Image of ‘The West’: Frontier Economies,” challenged us to take stock of what we enjoy about the American West, to ponder the reasons for our interest, and to take care to be appreciative of the history and culture of its Native inhabitants, rather than appropriative. Speaking on such topics in front of a body founded almost solely on appreciation of the West posed some danger, but Ms. Moore rather deftly navigated those choppy waters to enlighten where others may have admonished. If we were to distill the thesis of her discussion into a single phrase, perhaps the most apt would be, “Give credit where credit is due.”

Perhaps the most impactful section of the presentation featured a historic, Blackfoot-made capote, juxtaposed against a modern, Native-“inspired” coat from the Pendleton company. Ms. Moore highlighted the specific elements of the historic garment, illustrating

its connection to a specific time, place, and ethnic group. No such specificity was present in the Pendleton coat, as it was simply a mishmash of Native-like designs in a stereotypically Southwestern color scheme. This comparison served to drive home the point that we should be wary of objects and ideas formed from disparate bits of the art and history of marginalized groups, like America’s indigenous communities, and forcing them through a cultural meat-grinder to arrive at something more readily digestible to consumers unfamiliar with the originals.

In the question-and-answer section following the main presentation, Ms. Moore reiterated that the intention of efforts to mitigate this type of co-option is not to demonize those who occasionally stray from *appreciation* into *appropriation* (“Let he who is without sin,” etc.), but rather to properly attribute artifacts and ideas to the cultures that bore them. Most scholars would never use a source in their research without citing it. The same thinking could be applied to consumers in the context of the art and artifacts of our indigenous neighbors. It is possible, and likely preferable, to spend our money on goods made by the people whose culture such products represent. Or, at the very least, we can *give credit where credit is due*.

— Alan Griffin



Down the Western Book Trail . . .

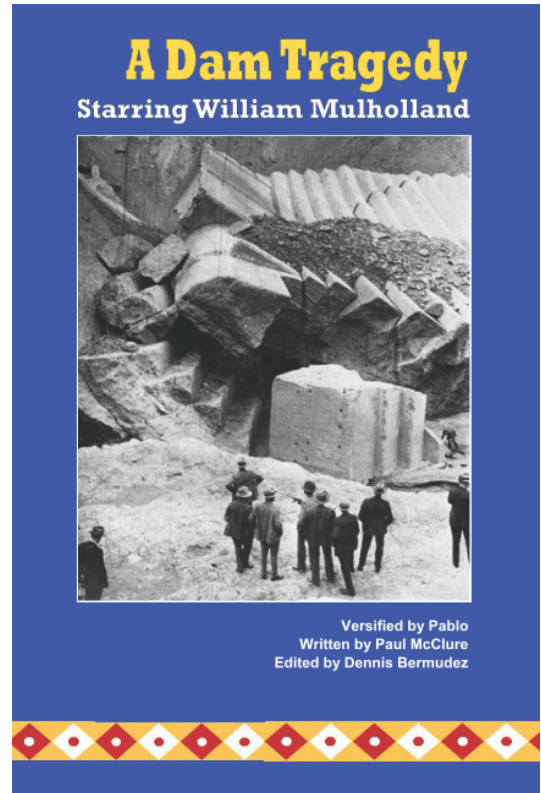
A DAM TRAGEDY STARRING WILLIAM MUHOLLAND, by Paul McClure. Create Space, North Charleston, SC, 2018. 156 pp. Map, Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Paper, \$9.95.

Author Paul McClure and his alter ego, poet Pablo, have created a book that is part prose, part poetry, and lots of historic photographs. It concerns the politics behind the creation of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, the collapse of the St. Francis Dam, and the rise and fall of William Mulholland. An iconic figure in Los Angeles' evolution into a major metropolis, Mulholland was instrumental in the creation of the aqueduct that brought water from the Owens River 233 miles south to the city in 1913.

McClure provides an unusual format for this controversial story by dividing the book into five acts, each with four scenes. Within this artificial framework McClure interweaves the historical narrative with Pablo's poetry, sort of a Greek chorus commenting on the events. The twin approach of prose and poetry sometimes gets contradictory since objective history cites key resources while the poetry can be very subjective. At times, "Pablo" is opinionated to the point where opinion gets in the way of facts.

Readers will find the narrative sometimes confusing—repetitive in some details, and with events out of chronological order. The descriptions of the aqueduct's opponents on page 33 mixes up events that took place between 1905-1912 and the 1920s. Andrae Nordskog and Frederic Finkle were most vociferous in the construction of the St. Francis Dam in the 1920s; Sam T. Clover voiced his opposition much earlier in 1906-1907. The picture caption on page 61 locates Mulholland on the right, but he's sitting on the left in the photo.

On the positive side, there are numerous photographs throughout the book, and McClure makes it very easy for readers interested in the pictures by listing where they were obtained. Almost all of them were



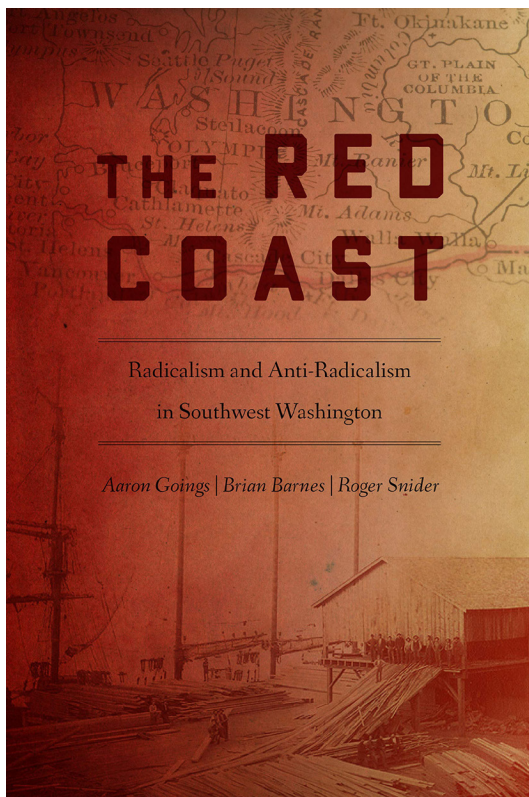
accessed via the Internet. This treasure trove of illustrations would not have been possible to access prior to the advent of the Internet and the many websites that provided them. McClure did an excellent job in researching and located these photographs that include not only the destruction of the dam but also scenes of aqueduct construction, the dedication of the Cascades, and portraits of the main characters in the history of the aqueduct. The bibliography includes photos of the covers of most of the listed books, and motion picture title cards that utilized the water controversy as a theme.

— Abraham Hoffman

THE RED COAST: *Radicalism and Anti-Radicalism in Southwest Washington*, by Aaron Goings, Brian Barnes, and Roger Snider. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, 2019. 236 pp. Notes, Index. Paperback, \$24.95.

History from below, or history told from the perspective of common people, provides a more comprehensive understanding of what marginalized groups and the working poor experience. Aaron Goings, Brian Barnes, and Roger Snider explore the early twentieth-century Pacific Northwest through this point of view. They focus on labor history and the class struggle that challenged the status quo by targeting various industries vital to coastal capitalism. *The Red Coast* details the efforts of Southwest Washington's working class to make their grievances known; workplace sabotage, massive interstate strikes, and reinforcements from the Industrial Workers of the World demanding improved working conditions and higher wages. Radical immigrants, American Communists, I.W.W. "Wobblies," and other union laborers faced off against the police, armed mobs hired by employers, labor spies, and hired vigilantes, risking life and limb for a better outlook at their jobs. *Red Coast* uncovers the lengths the employers went to in order to impede social change. It also reveals the tenacity of union worker resistance.

The authors divided *Red Coast* into easily digested chapters that give adequate detail without meandering on the subject. Good observations are made in addressing actions taken by both the employers and the workers. By analyzing press coverage, organizational notes, and literature, the authors show the level of class consciousness possessed by the workers and their employers, and how these contrasting perspectives clashed across numerous strikes and political conflicts. Employers employed various carrots and sticks to obstruct union organizing, by brokering compromises, "dividing and conquering" their work force through discriminatory hiring practices, or by resorting to violence. Workers responded with boycotts, strikes, and sabotage.



Meaningful connections are made with present-day events and issues, as well as historic connections between different marginalized groups. The attention paid to racial issues in Southwest Washington shines a light on the intersecting qualities of anti-immigration and anti-union sentiment among many of the affluent Washingtonians responding to the strikes and the presence of Communists. For this critical investigation of American labor history to make incisive conclusions, *Red Coast* requires a focus on one side or the other. The authors obviously sympathize with the laborers.

No historical text is without bias, and this book is no exception. Subjectivity does not inherently tarnish historical research, but authorial proclivities should be frankly acknowledged. *Red Coast* is openly supportive of the working class and all of its more radical suggestions for social change. The authors' distaste for the employing class ensures that humanizing characteristics are reserved for the laborers, who are the "protagonists" of this historic narrative. With

little to no sympathy shown for the employers above throughout the text, this book is a pure “history from below.” The authors treat the working class as the driving force in shifting working conditions and challenging the expectations of capitalism in Southwest Washington. To its credit, *Red Coast* does not fabricate or embellish information for the sake of propaganda, and the authors make no effort to deceive or manipulate the reader. Their bias is made clear from the very start of the text and is repeated in detail at the very end when they draw conclusions with present-day politics.

Red Coast is highly recommended for those interested in labor history in the American West. Paying homage to union workers, the authors give respect to those that fought for better working conditions despite having the threats to their right to assembly. One could easily sit down to read a chapter at a time and be captivated by the well-researched snippets of pro- and anti-union direct action. Enthusiasts of the American West are often drawn to legends of cowboys, gun-slingers, and homesteaders, but this book on the Pacific Northwest’s unsung fishing and lumber industries details a time and place just as lawless and rough around the edges.

—Arkaz Vardanyan

In Progress. . . ETA 2023. . .



Indians, Latinos, and Confederates, a Western American Family: 1598-1973

By Frank J. Brito

Above photo: Santiago Brito (1821-1908), the author’s great-grandfather, in Silver City, New Mexico. Santiago, a former soldier, was a miner and stage operator when he posed in his best suit of clothes with six-gun and bugle in November, 1888. He was the patriarch of a family incorporating AmerIndians of several different tribes, Latinos, and even former Confederate soldiers. The Brito family has deep roots in New Mexico, Chihuahua, Arizona, Sonora, and California. If the planets are in alignment, to be published as Brand Book 26 in 2023.



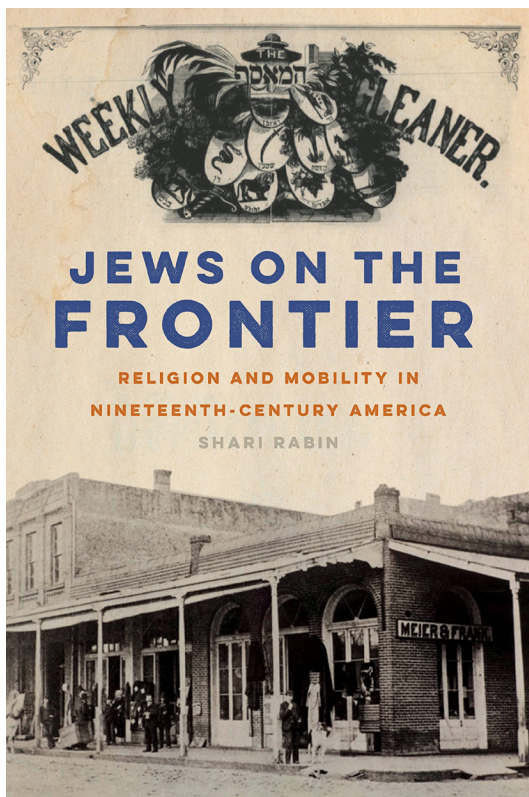
JEWS ON THE FRONTIER: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America, by Shari Rabins. New York University Press, New York, 2017. 208 pp. Notes, Index. Paperback, \$25.00.

Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in 19th century America was an eye-opening education for me and inspired self-reflection. In the 1800s, as the size of the U.S. doubled with the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase, the new U.S. frontier hosted people of diverse backgrounds, beliefs, languages and life styles. Many of these settlers, including hundreds of thousands of Jews, had immigrated to the United States from Europe. However, access to the basic resources they were accustomed to, including language, food, and religion, weren't easily obtainable, and in some cases, didn't yet exist on the American frontier. The new inhabitants had to adapt, adjust, modify and many times do without or create make shift scenarios for every aspect of life.

Author Shari Rabin dissects the journey of the Jewish people to the 19th-century American frontier and lists a multitude of challenges they encountered. For several generations, Jewish religious leaders expressed frustration as they tried to employ regulations for the Jewish people in the expanding U.S. Over time, the mobility of the Jews led to an American reform of the Jewish faith.

Rabin documents the deplorable Jewish oppression throughout Europe in the 1800s, in countries such as England, France, Spain, Portugal, Russia, Poland, as well as Germany. Jews were not widely permitted to be landowners, nor were they able to pursue employment in certain vocations. Jews were forced to obtain travel passports or face grave consequences and, of course, the atrocities that followed during WWII were simply unimaginable. I cringe when I realize this actually occurred in our world less than 100 years ago. As a result, millions of Jews immigrated to the U.S.

This book focuses on the journey of the Jewish people to the U.S. frontier. As the U.S. expanded, the Jewish U.S. frontier



population did so as well, but limitations still existed. Jewish men were provided the freedom of mobility with their families, because they were considered "White." However, Jewish women's mobility was much more limited.

As technology improved (the expansion of the railroad, the circulation of newspapers and books providing better communication) massive expansion of the Jewish people from eastern seaboard cities to the Midwest, south and western frontier exploded. As the Jews settled into new frontier regions, they struggled to establish cohesive religious congregations and communities. There were problems with obtaining kosher foods. Jewish children were forced to attend public schools. These changes to their way of life compelled American Jews to adapt. Due to the lack of Jewish education, Jews established their own Sunday schools for their children.

Rabin sites countless examples of religious and dietary practices that the pioneer Jews had encountered in the frontier. For the better part of the 19th century, they suffered

through adversity as thousands of other Americans did on the frontier.

The frontier Jews' religious practices were altered because synagogues were not yet established or they were too few or far away. Many times Jews couldn't assemble a quorum for prayer and many Jewish peddlers found it necessary to work on the Sabbath in order to make a living. Some Jews rationalized and made pragmatic adjustments and made 'intent rather than obligation' decisions when it came to their religious practices. Not surprisingly, interfaith marriages occurred between Jews and gentiles, and in several cases, some Jews simply stopped practicing.

However, as the century advanced, Jewish congregations became better established and stability began to set in. Vital statistics were recorded for marriages, births and deaths and central regulations were beginning to commence. Between 1850-1870, the distribution of Jewish books became more widely available, and more Jewish schools and colleges were founded.

As I read through the numerous accounts, I found myself sympathizing with these Jewish pioneers. What choices did they have? Of course, the unavailability of resources led to changes that may have not been anticipated but Jews were forced to accept. As a result, different affiliations formed, religious traditions were broken, rituals were challenged, and the Jewish faith was divided forever. At the very least, it certainly led to modifications of the Jewish lifestyle and faith.

Rabin's account provided me with an enhanced admiration of the courage of the Jewish people as they searched for a better life for their families and the generations to follow. It made me recall the story of my own great-grandmother, who came to the U.S. from Ireland in the 1880s, also in search of a better life. Much like the Jewish frontier settlers, she took an enormous risk and sacrifice to make a better future for the generations that followed. I'm sure she had to deal with major changes, language and religious issues, and loneliness—a condition that is often overlooked or underestimated. Rabin places a huge focus on the loneliness of the Jews on the frontier. In many cases, the new

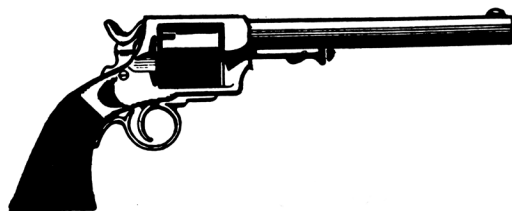
frontier created long periods of separation from loved ones and in some cases permanent isolation.

I found this book to be a fascinating and thought-provoking journey of hardships and survival. Every American has a story and many of them can be traced back to the development of the U.S. and the subsequent frontier expansion. Perhaps the most important aspect was to give me a better appreciation of my own ancestors who came before me and laid the foundation for me for a better life.

Despite all of the trials and tribulations of the frontier, the Jewish people and their faith survived and their leaders strove to "Bring unity among the members of every congregation, among all the American Synagogues." It led to debate and to reform for future generations.

— Tom Connolly

Special Issue *Branding Iron*, Coming Soon!



The Branding Iron will be exchanging its namesake hot rods for some *Shootin' Irons* in the next special themed edition, out in Spring 2023. Whether used for hunting, sport, or dangerous deeds, firearms have been an essential part of the history and myths of the American West. Have any stories or articles about guns and gunslingers? Feel free to share!

To be considered for publication in this special issue, please submit your articles by May 15th, 2023. Of course, non-firearms articles are always welcome and encouraged for future non-themed issues.

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

Coming Soon...

Los Angeles Corral Brand Book 25!



The Los Angeles Corral's first-ever all-poetry Brand Book is at the printer, and expected back in time for distribution at our October, 2022, Rendezvous. *Award Winning Cowboy Poetry, Historical Verse and Rhapsodic Rhymes*, edited by Gary Turner and Tami Turner-Revel, will be offered for sale at the same low price as preceding *Brand Book 24*. Please come to our Fall Rendezvous where the editors and contributing authors will sign your own copy of the beautifully-illustrated *Brand Book 25*, whose endpapers are previewed above.