



**Figure 1:** The island of California, as depicted in a map by Dutch cartographer Johannes Vingboons, circa 1650. This piece of geographical fantasy was copied from earlier Spanish charts, and persisted on many maps well into the 18th century, and even into the 19th century on some Chinese and Japanese maps. Interestingly, this particular map labels the island with two words as “Cali Fornia.” Public domain internet image.

## What’s in a Name? Plenty, if that Name is California

By Abraham Hoffman

In 1982 the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners published *Brand Book 16*, an anthology edited by long-time Corral member Raymund F. Wood. Of the eleven

contributors to the volume, nine were Corral members and two were non-members. One of the non-members, John P. Harrington,

*(Continued on Page 3)*

# The Branding Iron

Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners  
*Published Quarterly*  
 Winter – Spring – Summer – Fall

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For subscription information: Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners, P. O. Box 1891, San Gabriel, CA 91778  
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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 . . .

Happy 2023, and with this new year comes the Winter issue of *The Branding Iron!* Our lead article comes from Living Legend Abe Hoffman, who writes about the history of the naming of California, from its 16th-century Spanish fiction inspiration to more contemporary debates over the intent behind our Golden State's appellation. Our next feature is from former Sheriff Brian Dillon, who shares some humorous and fascinating high-stakes Central American mustache history. How's that for a topic?

If you missed any meetings this season, you can experience them vicariously through

the Roundup summaries written by new fellow Darran Davis, and Alan Griffin. We also have a book review for your consideration, thanks to Living Legend Gary Turner.

As always, many thanks to all of the contributors who help to make *The Branding Iron* something that we all enjoy reading. I can't do it without you!

If you have any ideas for articles that you will like to contribute, please feel free to get in touch with my contact information below. Thanks, and Happy Trails!

John Dillon  
[John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com](mailto:John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com)

was exceptional in that he had died in 1961, two decades before his article was published.<sup>1</sup> In an editorial note, Wood said that Harrington had spent years doing research on the etymology of the name "California." He intended to utilize his research notes for an article to be printed by the Academy Library Guild of Fresno. Ray Wood accepted the invitation to edit the notes into a publishable article, the final version to be approved by Harrington. Other obligations kept Harrington from giving final approval to the manuscript. Years passed, and in 1961 illness prevented Harrington from giving doing so. After Harrington's death, Wood kept the manuscript, finally getting permission from Harrington's employer, the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution.

Wood was somewhat vague as to the disposition of Harrington's research notes. In the *Brand Book's* biographies of the contributors, Wood stated that the Smithsonian had the custody of Harrington's papers, but in an editorial note at the end of the article, Wood also said that the notes were going "in an archive in California," without naming the archive. Wood also said that the notes were going to be published in "a forthcoming edition of a Los Angeles Corral of Westerners' *Brand Book*," but they never were.<sup>2</sup>

In "California the Name: New Materials and Slants," Harrington disputed Edward Everett Hale's "discovery" in 1862 of Garci Ordóñez de Montalvo's book *Las Sergas de Esplandián*. Instead, Harrington traced the origins of Montalvo's "California back across centuries where the name evolved from earlier books and different languages, plus earlier epics such as the *Song of Roland* and the *Song of Antioch*. Harrington made little effort to connect Montalvo's California to the actuality of the book and the Pacific Coast when by 1542 Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo referred to the land he was sailing past as 'California.'"

A hundred years before *Brand Book 16* published Harrington's article, Edward Everett Hale (not to be confused with orator and politician Edward Everett remembered mainly as the person who gave a two-hour speech before Abraham Lincoln's

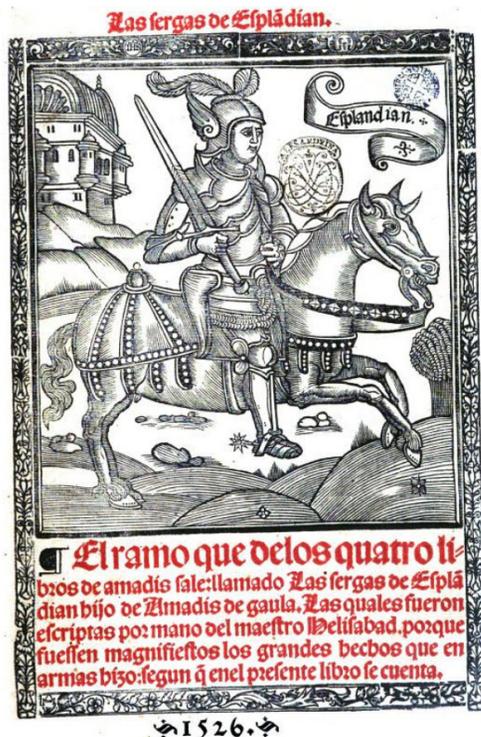


Figure 2: Frontispiece of the second, 1526 edition of *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, by Garci Ordóñez de Montalvo. Although not renowned for its literary merits like the much later *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, the schlocky *Esplandián* novel nevertheless left its own imprint on history by providing the probable origin for the name of California, via the character of the Amazon queen, Calafia. Public domain internet image.

Gettysburg Address), happened to be visiting Harvard Professor George Ticknor, a scholar renowned for his research and writing on Spanish literature. Browsing in Ticknor's private library, Hale noticed a volume on the well-stocked bookshelves. It was the 1510 edition of Garci Ordóñez de Montalvo's sequel to *Amadis of Gaul*, titled *Las Sergas de Esplandián* [The Adventures of Esplandián].

Leafing through the pages of the book, Hale came across what became famous in just about every history of California written to date. Although the *Amadis* book consisted of four sections, Montalvo added a fifth one in which he described the siege of Constantinople in 1453. In this contest between Christian and Muslim, Montalvo told how Queen Calafia brought her Amazon

women warriors to aid the Muslims in taking control of Constantinople. Where did the Amazon warriors come from? Here's what Montalvo wrote:

"Know that at the right hand of the Indies there was an island called California, very close to the region of the Terrestrial Paradise, which was inhabited by black women, without there being a single man among them, their style of living being about the same as that of the Amazons. The women were of valiant and strong bodies, and of warm hearts and great stamina; the island for its own part had the most crags and rough rocks to be found in the world; their weapons were all of gold, as were also the harnesses of the wild beasts on which, after they had tamed them, they rode, that in all the island there was no other metal."

There was nothing unusual about Montalvo's book other than the fact it was published about 50 years after Gutenberg invented movable type. Almost overnight his invention resulted in two important consequences: the incredible increase of novels, broadsides, pamphlets, and anything now made available to large audiences, and the publication of fictional works telling of fantastic adventures and heroic epics. Such books included earlier stories and poems such as *Romance of the Rose*, but now these and other books could be made available to an audience rapidly becoming literate. Potboilers proved especially popular, and *Las Sergas de Esplandián* went through many editions. These stories became so popular that a century later, Miguel de Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*, a marvelous satire in which the Don read too many such works of fiction and became delusional!

Hale gave scant credit to finding the book in Ticknor's library (a few extant copies were in other American libraries), but he lost no time in claiming to have "discovered" the origin of the name "California." In April 1862, he provided a paper titled, "The Name of California," to the American Antiquarian Society. A certain Mr. Henry, who called the

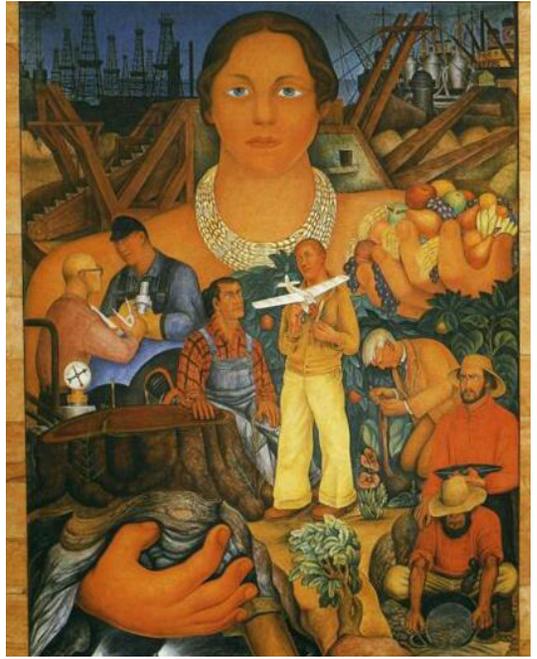
paper "interesting and curious," read it at the semiannual meeting of the Society at the Hall of the American Academy in Boston on April 30. For some reason, Hale did not attend this meeting to recite his article himself. The American Antiquarian Society subsequently published it in its Proceedings.<sup>3</sup>

Evidently Hale sought a wider audience for his "discovery," for he wrote an article for *The Atlantic Monthly* that was published without his name except for a concluding paragraph by an editor that cites Hale, "who called attention to this rare romance." The article provided an English translation of that part of *Las Sergas* when Queen "Cal a fia" [sic] comes to the aid of the Muslims in the siege of Constantinople.<sup>4</sup>

Hale was a prolific writer, and for most of the 87 years of his life (1822-1909) he authored novels, sermons, pamphlets, short stories, newspaper articles, and historical essays. His publication record was complicated in that he often used pseudonyms or wrote anonymously. He also established his own publishing company, printing and reprinting his various writings. Hale may have written historical essays, but he was no historian; his translation freely accepted the invented dialogue in which Montalvo wrote his novel.<sup>5</sup>

In 1872 Hale published *His Level Best and Other Stories*, a collection of his articles. One of them was "The Queen of California," Hale claiming that "Since the first publication of that translation, the principal public libraries of this country have obtained copies of that romance." The volume would be reprinted in 1909 and again in 1969 in the *American Short Story Series*.<sup>6</sup>

From 1872 to the present day, the story of how California got its name would be respected in popular and scholarly publications. What follows is not definitive but a representative sampling of Montalvo's description and the various arguments as to the actual origin of the state's name. Hubert Howe Bancroft in his *History of California, Volume I, Chapter III*, published in 1886, examined the descriptions of such early Spanish explorers and conquistadores as Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and others before crediting Hale who "was so fortunate as to discover the



The many faces of Queen Calafia in California murals. **Figure 3 (Above Left):** Maynard Dixon, Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco, 1926. **Figure 4 (Above Right):** Diego Rivera, Pacific Coast Stock Exchange, San Francisco, 1931. **Figure 5 (Bottom):** Lucile Lloyd, California state capitol, Sacramento, 1937. All images in the public domain.



source whence the discovery obtained the name....No intelligent man will ever question the account of Hale's theory." Bancroft cited Hale's publication in the *Proceedings, Atlantic Monthly*, and *His Level Best* as sources for his claim.<sup>7</sup>

In 1910 the Geographical Society of the Pacific published "The Origin and the Meaning of the Name of California" in its *Transactions and Proceedings*, with fourteen articles written by George Davidson, president of the Geographical Society and professor at the University of California. This was a scholarly work, coming two years after Herbert Eugene Bolton's *Spanish Exploration in the Southwest, 1542-1706*. Both scholars utilized important contemporary documents in their work. Giving credit where it was due, Davidson, in his article "The first Mention of the Origin of the Name California, in Recent Years," credited George Ticknor with comparing *Las Sergas de Esplandián* and *Amadis of Gaul*, with Montalvo getting some criticism for its "low and meagre style." Ticknor made the comparison in his book *History of Spanish Literature*, first published in 1849 and reprinted in 1872.<sup>8</sup>

Davidson awarded second place to Hale, "who presented a paper on the subject to the American Antiquarian Society in 1862." Davidson said that Hale's "attention was accidentally diverted for a few weeks since I will now prove the origin of the name of California as applied to the peninsula so known." Hale thanked Ticknor for his hospitality in visiting his invaluable collection, and to that kind courtesy which it opens to every student, and illustrate it from the freshness of his own studies, am I indebted for all the authorities of value which I am able to cite here." Davidson concluded his chapter with another quote from Hale: "I know I furnish no etymology for that word California...the root Calif, as the Spanish spelling for the sovereign of the Musselman power of the time, was in the mind of the author as he invented these Amazon allies to the infidel power."<sup>9</sup>

For the rest of the 20th century to the present day, Ticknor's part in the use of the *Esplandián* novel would remain on the dusty shelves of historical scholarship while Hale,

who at least paid his dues, would be the one remembered by historians and writers of popular history.

In 1914 Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, a writer of popular books on Spanish California, published *Spanish and Indian Place Names of California*. Chapter II began, "First comes the name of California herself, the sin (peerless one) as Don Quixote says of his Dulcinea. This name, strange to say, was a matter of confusion and conjecture for many years, until, in 1862, Edward Everett Hale accidentally hit upon the explanation accepted by historians." She then discussed theories of the derivation of the name, rather shamelessly repeating earlier descriptions almost to the point of plagiarism, though she does mention Bancroft, Davidson, and Ticknor, "but Mr. Ticknor never refers to it simply as literature, without any thought of connecting it to the name of the state. This connection was undoubtedly thought of by Mr. Hale and was discussed in the paper read before the Historical Society of Massachusetts in 1862, therefore the honor of the discovery of the origin of the state's name must in justice be awarded to him"<sup>10</sup>

Two years later, Charles Chapman, an assistant professor of California history at the University of California, contributed an article to *Grizzly Bear*, the magazine published by the Native Sons of the Golden West. He printed a letter from P.L. Miller, commissioner of education in Puerto Rico, offering some evidence that the word "California" could be traced back in one form or another to the epic poem *Song of Roland*. Chapman commented, "Perhaps we shall learn some day that our beloved state name traces back through Spain to the land and time of Mahomet."<sup>11</sup>

The next month, Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez chimed in with a complaint against "Bancroft and others" that the name of California was given in derision by Cortés and his followers to express their disappointment upon finding the peninsula of Lower California...a barren desert, does not seem to be based either in fact, probabilities, or analogy with the history of western Spanish America nomenclature." She went on to extol the region's virtues written by Cortés

and others in anticipation of the riches they would find.<sup>12</sup>

The next major scholarly effort after Davidson's work came from Ruth Putnam, a specialist in medieval European history, who collaborated with Berkeley Professor Herbert Priestley, to write "California The Name," in the *University of California Publications in History* series. In her lengthy article, Putnam traced the theme of heroic epics appearing in print after Gutenberg's press promoted the growth of literacy in Europe. Putnam wrote, "Edward Everett Hale chanced upon the word 'California' in a Spanish romance three and a half centuries old," and leaped to the conclusion that here was the source of the state's names, omitting any mention of Ticknor's library. She implied that he was "fully convinced that his conjecture was correct."<sup>13</sup>

Putnam credited George Davidson for having examined the evidence carefully and came to the conclusion that Dr. Hale's conclusion was the correct one. However, she offered a broader focus on how a fictional story over several centuries came to be the region's name. Combining history with fiction contributed to the novels of Amadis and Montalvo's sequel made for a popular tale and, in modern terms, a best seller for its time. In fact, Montalvo's sequel was followed by several more sequels to the sequel. It is impossible to ignore Calafia, observed Putnam, "if a light literature had any weight at all in that period of time." For Putnam, the naming of California served as only a part of the context—and conquest—by Cortés as observed by Bernal Díaz del Castillo and many others who wrote about their experiences. After more than a century, Putnam's essay stands the test of time as a deeply researched study that is well written and authoritative.<sup>14</sup>

In 1924 Charles E. Chapman's book *A History of California: The Spanish Period* was published, along with a volume by Occidental College Professor Robert Glass Cleland who took the next period under study, *A History of California: The American Period*.<sup>15</sup>

Chapter VI in Chapman's book, "Origin and Application of the Name California," mentioned possible sources for the name,

such as Califa fornax" (Latin for "hot furnace"), "Calliforno (Catalan for "hot oven" or "Lime and furnace"), and other words. "These are a few names out of many," he observed, "all of which were barren guesses, unsustained by a shred of evidence." He credited Ticknor with a mention of California in the 1849 work *History of Spanish Literature*, but noted that Ticknor didn't make any connection with the Amazon Queen and *Las Sergas*. Chapman's description runs remarkably similar to Putnam's "Hale chanced upon an old Spanish novel" in his jumping at once to the connection. Chapman's chapter summarized the story of Queen Calafia and her Amazon army coming to the aid of the Sultan at Constantinople as told by Montalvo. Much like modern superheroes, the adventures of Amadis, Esplandián, and Calafia appear in one or another of fourteen volumes.<sup>16</sup>

Having dealt with the *Esplandián* story, Chapman turned to the question of where did Montalvo get the name of California. Did he get it from Greek, Arabic, or French? The latter language mentioned "Califorone" in the eleventh-century *Song of Roland*. He concluded, "There is no direct evidence associating the name of California with Ordóñez's romance, but the circumstantial evidence is so strong that the connection has been generally accepted since Edward Everett Hale first advanced the idea." Chapman based his chapter on the works of Davidson, Putnam, Sanchez, and himself.<sup>17</sup>

A spirited discussion about the naming of California appeared in *Names*, the journal of the American Name Society, founded in 1951. Several note scholars debated California's origin. Erwin Gudde started things off in his article, "The Name California," by stating, "We are not quite sure of its etymology, origin and meaning, no can we tell the exact date that the name came into existence." That said, Gudde offered a summary of all the articles and books mentioned above, from the Ticknor library and Hale's bold statement to Davidson, Putnam, and Chapman (and more), stating, "The question and etymology of Montalvo's name, the date of the transfer to the New World, the reason for it, and who did it, again and again stimulated

historians, philologists, geographers to delve into the problem in order to find satisfactory answers."<sup>18</sup>

Gudde did credit previous scholars, but he took no prisoners in assessing their findings. According to Gudde, Davidson's conclusions were "untenable," Putnam "comes to an impossible conclusion...that the name was applied in derision." He praised Chapman as "the best scholarly condensed account intended for the general reader," a somewhat left-handed compliment. Gudde's article was not without humor. He describes some of the outlandish nominations given by lay people and even scholars who should have known better. These included an etymology derived from Calpurnia, one of Julius Caesar's wives; and even an inn called California in England in 1888, and that the name came from early English colonists, not Spaniards. Gudde stated, "There is not the slightest evidence or possibility of logical deduction to connect the two names." As for George R. Stewart's discussion of California's name in his book *Names on the Land*, Davidson found Stewart's work "fascinating though extremely subjective."<sup>19</sup>

Gudde devoted most of his article to debunking the various theories, historical and etymological, given by previous writers. He concluded generously that Hale's writings "have never been discredited or seriously challenged"; that Montalvo coined the names Calafia and California, leaving all the attempts to find sources in medieval epics and cognate words, unproven and unsatisfying. His final conclusion on the matter: "A navigator sometime between 1533 and 1542 landed on, or at least saw from board or ship the land which is now Baja California, imagined that he had discovered the realm of Queen Calafia, and placed the name on the map."<sup>20</sup>

Needless to say, this wasn't the final word. In the "Names in Brief" section in the September 1954 issue of *Names*, Gudde noted that Francisco Preciado of the Ulloa expedition had seen California in 1540, not 1542 as Gudde had previously mentioned.<sup>21</sup>

George R. Stewart, English professor at Berkeley, responded to Gudde's brief criticism of Stewart's *Names on the Land*, pointing

out that in Spain there were towns such as Catayud and Forno. Stewart rested his rejoinder on solid evidence, quoting and citing early conquistadores/explorers including Cortés, Oviedo, and Herrera. He offered several reasons why Cortés was already familiar with Montalvo's story and California. Other than changing the estimated dates in his book from 1530 to 1524, Stewart concluded, "I stand on the account of California presented in *Names on the Land*...I go ready also to think that this is the most likely time for the name to have been applied to it by Cortez."<sup>22</sup>

Final comments in *Names* came from Brief Notes. They were not likely to be the last notes on the naming controversy. Donald G. Baker reminded readers that there were Greek words with which Montalvo might have been familiar—Callifolis and Caligrafia. Perhaps in jest, he quoted a line from Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*: "O fabjus day, Caloo, Callay." "I supposed we must write Montalvo's ghost town for a final answer," he wrote, "and ask him whether he associates warm or pretty with the sound Kali. His answer might be 'both'"<sup>23</sup>

A second note by Charles Edgar Gilliam argued for the word Caliph as Montalvo's California. Gilliam stated that the Moorish ruler, the Caliph, represented wealth and riches, and the attraction of opulence, "a name for a fabulous land." He sided with Hale and Gudde in their views on California's name.<sup>24</sup>

The naming issue did not reside exclusively for scholars. Ralph Roske's book *Everyman's Eden: A History of California*, was published by Macmillan Company in 1968. A history professor at the University of Nevada, Roske wrote his book as intended either for general readers or possibly as a textbook. His description of the naming of California was succinct and factual, arguing that Hale's account carried more weight than claims of those who said that Latin words *Calido fornex* (hot furnace). However, Roske ignored Ticknor's library, simply stating that "Hale discovered an old Spanish novel," giving the impression it may have been found in some unknown place. "In any event," he wrote, from the tip of Baja California northward, the land was permanently christened

California. California is the only state named for a mythical place in a fantastic novel."<sup>25</sup>

Edward Everett Hale's life story could not be written without some attention to his writing about California. John R. Adams' biography, *Edward Everett Hale*, unfortunately boiled down the issue by writing about it in one sentence: "Hale's best contributions included the "Queen of California leading article for [*Atlantic Monthly*] March 1864." There is no context to inform the reader as to the identity of the Queen of California or the book in Ticknor's library."<sup>26</sup>

Another book, written for that potential customer in a large bookstore, T.H. Watkins's *California: An Illustrated History*, printed Montalvo's famous paragraph with no mention of Hale, only to state that the name 'was in common use by the early 1540s."<sup>27</sup>

In 1980 Barbara and Rudy Marinacci co-authored *California's Spanish Place Names*, not to be confused with the works of Sanchez, Gudde, and Stewart as noted earlier. The authors made short work of Montalvo's novel and Hale's finding of it, briefly noting that Hale "happened upon Montalvo's novella, with no context to its place in Spanish literature. We do get a couple of trivia items; James D. Phelan, San Francisco mayor, U.S. senator, and banker named his estate Montalvo, and there is an unincorporated village in Ventura County named Montalvo."<sup>28</sup>

That same year, Frank H. Gille edited *Encyclopedia of California* in which a summary is presented as the fact and theories of the naming of California. The facts are briefly stated, but of interest is the discussion of other words apart from Montalvo's naming. Gille speculates on Native words: "Kali forno," signifying high hills, mountain, or native land. Another word, Tchalifalial, sandy land beyond the water. Gille also supplies some Greek Arabic, Spanish, and Latin words in a discussion that almost ignores Montalvo."<sup>29</sup>

In recent years California history textbooks have become a competitive field. John Caughey's *California*, first published in 1940, went through four editions before yielding to multiple editions of works by Andrew Rolle, Walton Bean, Warren Beck, Robert Cherny,

and Richard B. Rice, some with co-authors. And this doesn't include the ones written for fourth grade students, or books dealing with specific topics, readers, or the monumental volumes by Kevin Starr.

All of the textbooks provide an introduction or first chapter that tell the story of Montalvo's naming of California. Judging from the writings discussed in this article, there is little doubt that the naming of California will continued to be discussed, debated, debunked, described, and always be a fascinating story about this Golden State.

## Notes

1. Harrington, 1982, pp. 113-132.
2. Ibid, pp. 132, 316.
3. Hale, 1862, pp 45-53.
4. *Atlantic Monthly*, 1864, pp. 265-278.
5. Holloway, 1954, pp. 89-94. See also Holloway, 1943. pp. 99-100.
6. Hale, 1872, pp. 234-278.
7. Bancroft, 1886, p. 66.
8. Davidson, 1910, p. 21.
9. Ibid, pp. 21-22.
10. Sanchez, 1914, pp. 13-18.
11. Chapman, 1916, p. 5.
12. Sanchez, 1916, p. 8.
13. Putnam, 1917, pp. 293-365.
14. Ibid. In two appendices Putnam traced the etymology of the word California and the novel *Amadis of Gaul* and its sequels.
15. A prolific scholar in California history, Cleland's works include *California in Our Time, 1900-1940*, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills*, and *From Wilderness to Empire*, an updated and revised work that combined Chapman's and Cleland's two books.
16. Chapman, 1924, pp. 59-66.
17. Ibid, p. 66.
18. Gudde, Jun 1954, pp. 121-122. See also Gudde, 1961, pp. 41-47.
19. Gudde, Jun 1954, pp. 124-125.
20. Ibid, p. 133.
21. Gudde, Sep 1954, p. 196.
22. Stewart, 1954, pp. 250-254. See also Stewart, 1958, pp. 14-15.
23. Baker, 1954, pp. 275-276.
24. Gilliam, 1954, p. 276.
25. Roske, 1968, pp. 41-42.

26. Adams, 1977, p. 76.  
 27. Watkins, 1973, pp. 17-22.  
 28. Marinacci, 1980, p. 28.  
 29. Gille, 1980, pp. 1-2.

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### Editor's Note:

To read more about the naming of California in recent L.A. Corral publications, see also Brand Book 24, *Aloha Amigos!*; and Keepsake 54, *Early Chapters in Southern California History*.

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## Coming Soon! A Literary Blast from the Past!

### Los Angeles Corral Brand Books 1-22 On Line!

The Los Angeles Corral is the most productive, in literary terms, of all the 70+ Westerners International organizations around the world. For more than 75 years we have published in three completely different mediums: *Brand Books*—26 hard bound, full-length volumes on Western topics; *Keepsakes*—56 soft-bound offerings of varying length, from short pamphlets to full-length scholarly studies; and our Quarterly *Branding Iron*—of which the present issue is the 309th to appear.

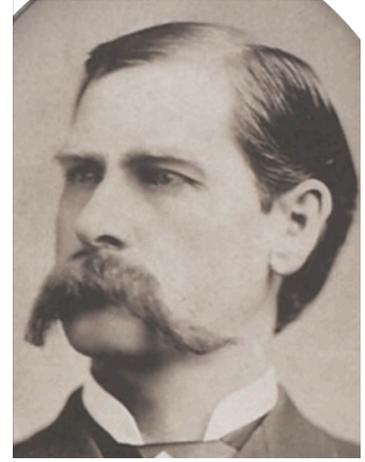
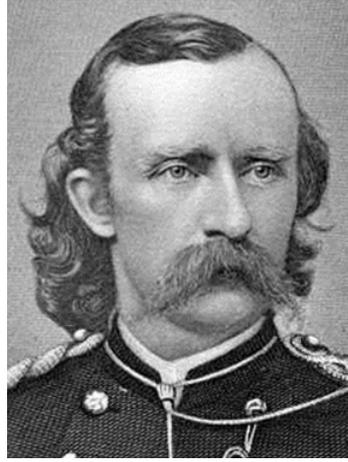
We are pleased to announce that in the very near future all of our early *Brand Books*, Volumes 1-22, the earliest of which have been out of print for more than sixty years, will become accessible on line on our Los Angeles Corral Web Page. They will be brought to you through the hard work and dedication of Joseph Cavallo, former Sheriff and Brand Book 23 Editor, Brian Dervin Dillon, former Sheriff and Brand Book 24 Editor, and our multitalented Web Wrangler and former first-ever Student Fellow, Patrick Mulvey.



### Introducing Darran Davis, our latest Pete Fries Fellow

Darran Davis is a San Fernando Valley native who is passionate about the history of the development of the Valley and L.A. as we know it today. Of special interest to Darran is the controversy that surrounds the original Los Angeles Aqueduct built by William Mulholland. Through his extensive research on real-life conspirators for his senior playwriting class assignment at CSUN, he came across the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners' Living Legend Abe Hoffman. After reaching out for months they met up at McDonald's in the West Valley and after the meeting Abe Hoffman extended an invite to become a Fellowship for the Los Angeles Corral of Westerners.

Darran Davis graduated from California State University Northridge with a BA degree in English Creative Writing in Fall 2020. His main emphasis was playwriting. Outside of the Corral, Darran works as a door host at the Hollywood Improv on Melrose where he performs stand-up comedy in hopes of becoming a passed regular performer.



Famous Bigotones of Western American History. **Figure 6 (Left):** James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickock, National Archives photo. **Figure 7 (Center):** George Armstrong Custer, North Dakota Historical Society photo. **Figure 8 (Right):** Wyatt Earp, Kansas Historical Society photo.

## Cowboys of Science and Big Bigotes

By Brian D. Dillon

### Introduction

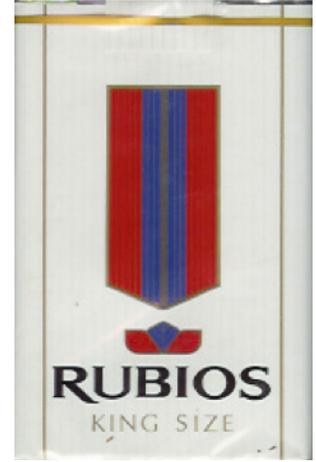
When old-time Westerners get together and engage in self-entertainment, a little bit of one-upmanship often occurs. This sometimes takes the form of *¿Quién es más macho?*—my horse is faster than yours, *my* dog is meaner, *my* pickup truck is uglier, *my* wife bakes better biscuits, etc. Sometimes the rivalry extends to facial hair: who has the biggest mustache, the best *bigotes*.<sup>1</sup>

The progenitors of this hoary, if not hairy, tradition in Western America are legendary. James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickock (1837-1876) always sported exuberant mustachios (Figure 6), if only to distract the observer from his receding chin, and thin, protruding, lips. Hickock had a very “non-Irish” lower jaw; he was badly short-changed in this department. In fact, *Wild Bill* was touchy and trigger-happy at least in part because of the unkind nick-name bestowed upon him by his detractors: *Duck-Bill*.

And then there was George Armstrong Custer (1839-1876), whose bad tactical decisions led to the greatest U.S. Cavalry defeat at the hands of AmerIndians during the long, sorry, drawn-out conflicts between

Eastern American “civilizers” and beleaguered Western Natives. Amongst his other “accomplishments,” George managed to unintentionally hit his *own horse* in the back of the head while firing his six-shooter at a full gallop, abruptly terminating forward progress that day.<sup>2</sup> Custer (Figure 7) had declared war on barbers at least as early as his Civil War service. A decade later, as his hairline receded, his mustache seemed to grow ever longer, perhaps in compensation. And a little Frenchified “goatee” or goat-beardlet came and went, as if Custer couldn’t make up his mind whether or not to conceal or to celebrate his chin (a much more “Irish” protuberance than Hickock’s). At least he did not follow the *facial fashion disaster* pioneered by his contemporary Ambrose Burnside, whose chin and lips were left smooth as a baby’s bottom, albeit surrounded with facial foliage: sideburns merging into cheek fuzz.

And we must not forget Wyatt Earp (1848-1929), whose “soup-strainer” mustache was the most prominent landmark (Figure 8) on what would otherwise have been a fairly unremarkable visage. The twin “droops” were, in fact, sometimes portrayed many times larger than life-sized in cartoons



*Cough'in Nails. Figure 9 (Left): A pack of Mexican Delicados Ovalados cigarettes, known to all who have survived smoking them as Delicrucidos. Figure 10 (Center): Honduran Puros, or hand-rolled cigars, bundled inside temporary newspaper wrappers. Photo courtesy of the Asociación Hondureña de Maquiladores. Figure 11 (Right): A pack of Guatemalan Rubios largos, which cost only fifteen cents fifty years ago. The Rubios cigarette company sponsored a "Best Moustache in the Country" competition in 1978, and the author was in contention for this title, for a while. All three images from the Internet, in the public domain.*

as a means of ridiculing the sometime bad-man, sometime law-man. This was decades before brain-dead *Tinseltonians* seized upon him as the most reliable stereotypical "Old West" protagonist for silent movies, then talkies, and finally T.V., where Earp was, inexplicably, portrayed as clean-shaven. In the mythical *Old West*, in very good *¿Quién es más macho?* style every last real cowboy, cavalryman, or lawman, and even phony-baloney "Wild West" showmen like Buffalo Bill Cody, sported a luxurious mustache: only lawyers, bloodless bankers and, of course, women, went through life *sans-bigotes*.

In previous issues of the *Branding Iron*, I have inflicted two earlier *Cowboys of Science* musings upon the reader. Both concerned transportation, and both were autobiographical rather than theoretical. *Cowboys of Science* (to the uninitiated or forgetful reader) are archaeologists, only semi-civilized individuals more comfortable in the company of dead people than living ones. We archaeologists dwell amidst the mountains, deserts, and jungles shunned by more timorous city-dwellers, and hob-nob with Indians, loggers, cowpokes, and miners. And, when we run out of North American continent, we head south. My first deathless Dillon *Cowboys*

*of Science* epistle extolled the virtues of the unsung hero of the equestrian world, the Mule,<sup>3</sup> while the second was a reverent paean to the modern cowboy's metal steed, his pickup truck.<sup>4</sup> Both prior literary offerings were factual, not fictional, as is this present, third, one. The geographic focus of all three is Central America, where what used to be called the "Wild West" in North America still lives on, and where most of the *Cowboys* are pure-blooded *Indians*.

### *¡Solo Para Ganadóres!*

Long ago, and far away, and not in this jurisdiction, like many of my contemporaries, I was a smoker.<sup>5</sup> In Northern California my favored brand of cigarette was Camel Filters. In the early 1970s they cost a half-dollar a pack. When scarce funds ran out, I "rolled my own" just like my cowboy buddies did, with Rizla rolling papers and Bull Durham tobacco from a white cotton pouch. These *fix-ins'* cost half of what a pack of Camels did. Unlike some of my cowboy friends, however, I never "chewed."<sup>6</sup> When I began *studying* archaeology in Mexico in 1973, then began *doing* archaeology in Guatemala the following year and in Honduras, Costa Rica and

Panama slightly later, I smoked what was locally available, always much cheaper than their *Gringo* counterparts.

In the jungle, your cigarette can quite literally keep you alive.<sup>7</sup> It is your best mosquito repellent and, consequently, your most effective anti-malaria prophylaxis. It is also the best distraction from all of the minor, infected, puncture wounds on your hands, arms, and lower legs resulting from the thorns and spines you constantly brushed up against, from the bug-bites, heat-rash, bot-fly larvae crawling around under your epidermis, and the blisters from toxic tree sap that dripped on you while you were cutting trails. Slow death from lung cancer at some far-off, mythical *future* time seemed a reasonable exchange for a small measure of *immediate* relief from such daily tropical torture.

The "bargain basement" cigarettes I smoked in Mexican bus and train stations at 2 A.M. were usually sold by crippled vendors on the sidewalk outside, sliding along on roller platforms. These were *Delicados Ovalados* (Figure 9). They went for 20 cents a pack: a penny a smoke. You only bought them when nothing else was available, for they tasted like horse manure adulterated with sulfur-rich sour crude. Their oval shape was said to have been the result of horses sitting on the casings, squashing them while contributing the fillings inside. You never asked for them by name, but by the pejorative slang term *Delicrudos*.

In Honduras the cigarettes were so bad that we all smoked cheap cigars or *puros* instead. Made from grade "Z" leaf, left over after upscale cigar makers had snaffled up the primo "Grade A, B, and C" leaves, their smoke would stop flying insects up to P-51 size, and they would burn for up to 45 minutes. Unlike Mexican *Delicrudos*, *puros de Honduras* were made of tobacco, for visits to the plantations where the leaf was grown revealed no horses in sight anywhere near the drying sheds. Best of all, they were very cheap, ranging from half a cent to only two cents each. You bought them in a big roll of 50 or 100 (Figure 10), tied together with the stripped central stem of a big tobacco leaf, with no bands or labels, just 100% tobacco.

You passed them out like party favors to your friends and workmen, all of whom happily puffed away, creating smoke-screens which made the bugs keep their distance. *Puros de Honduras* were made by Indians for sale to other Indians: each was hand-rolled, as the saying went, on the naked thigh of a young virgin jealously guarded by her watchful father. The cheapest of the cheap took the form of *cortos* rolled long and double-ended, then cut cleanly in half so that the "lighting end" was considerably larger than the mouth end. We archaeologists believed these *cortos* to have a half-life of at least 50,000 years. Smoking them generated so much tar and dark brown gooey residue that you routinely pulled the stogie from your mouth, and pressed its wet end against your T-shirt for *toxic fluid abatement*. You could always tell a fellow *puro* smoker, even without a lit stogie in his mouth, by the multiple brown circular stains on the left front shoulder of his T-shirt.

In Guatemala, where either *anything* is possible, or *nothing* is, the best *coughin' nails* were *Rubios* cigarettes (Figure 11). These were the favorites of the 4+ million Maya Indians that made up the bulk of the population a half-century ago as well as the handful of us *gringo* archaeologists studying their *antepasados*. Everybody could sing the *Rubios* advertising jingle, even tiny kids of only three or four. It ended with the proud boast *¡Solo Para Ganadores!* (only for winners!) You heard this jingle on every Guatemalan radio station in between *cumbia*, *salsa*, *ranchera*, *marimba*, and *mariachi* tunes and news updates, and also blared out over loudspeakers at open-air Indian markets where cigarettes were sold as singletons.

*Rubios* ("blondes" in vernacular Spanish) referred to the high-quality, light-colored tobacco they were made from. *Rubios* came in two sizes: *largos* ("longs," sometimes labeled "King Size") and *cortos* ("shorties"). The longs cost 15 cents a pack, less than a penny a piece, while the *cortos* were even cheaper: only 12 cents. Most Guatemalan Indians half a century ago were too poor to buy cigarettes by the pack, so most little *tiendas* catering to *Naturales* sold them for a penny a piece, making a five cent profit on each pack.



*Figure 12: Los Dos Bigotones. Obregón el Bigotón at right, in the front yard of my archaeological field camp at Las Tortugas, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. Having just shot dinner for my field crew, I am smoking a Rubio Largo and my mustache is so long I can tie its ends in a knot below my chin. My buddy at left, a Stanford graduate student, was a pretty close runner-up in the big bigotes department. Mal Sibbersen photo, 1977.*

Long ago and far away, I smoked at least a pack of *Rubios* every day in my tropical rain forest home. A greatly appreciated “perk” of employment on my archaeological field crews was that each of my Maya Indian workmen, besides being paid nearly three times the average daily wage at the time, also got a free pack of *Rubios* every day, to either smoke, or save, or trade.<sup>8</sup> So we were all smokin’ fools out in our jungle wonderland.

The impatient reader by now will probably be wondering whatever in the world *coughin’ nails* and mustaches have in common? Well, late in 1977, the *Rubios* cigarette company came up with a brilliant advertising idea: they would, the following year (timed to coincide with the 1978 Presidential election), award a prize to the *Rubios* smoker with the best mustache in all of Guatemala. Since I had already been growing my own

*bigotes* for around six months (“lost my scissors” as the old cowboy saying went) my buddies, *Naturales*, *Gringos*, and *Ladinos*<sup>9</sup> all urged me to enter this competition, since I had a head-start on any rivals.

### *¿El Campeón Bigotón?*

So I let it be known that I was “in the running” in the biggest mustache in Guatemala sweepstakes. The *Rubios* folks began announcing the names and lengths of the mustaches of various contenders over the radio at regular intervals, asking each one why they preferred their brand: “Because I am a winner!” was most often the response. Every time a competing mustache length was announced, out came the ruler, and we confirmed that I still had those frail city-dwellers beat with my own jungle-grown *bigotes*.



**Figure 13:** Obregón el Bigotón at center, with the best moustache in Guatemala rendered slightly larger than actual size at my archaeological field camp. The singing turtle at lower right connotes the name of the place, Las Tortugas. My old buddy Goyo Méndez, El Pato Diablo (the Devil Duck) at right with his boat in the Chixoy River, our primary means of travel in and out of my very isolated jungle paradise on the Mexican border (the line shown at lower left) in what was a free-fire zone at the time. The other three people in the cartoon are my U.C. Berkeley archaeology student volunteers. This 1977 cartoon was drawn by a good friend who, at age 22, was killed at Rubelsanto, 32 kms downriver from my field camp.

By early 1978 I could tie my left and right mustache halves into a square knot under my chin. And, when one of my Guatemalan buddies raised the issue of whether or not I, as a *Gringo*, could even enter the contest, I asked him to contact the *Rubios* folks and mention that I was a legal, resident alien, of Guatemala. The *Rubios* contest people responded that I was "O.K." as a contestant.

Because of my ubiquitous cowboy hat, and very long mustache (Figures 12 and 13) some of the *Ladinos* at the nearest outpost of civilization to my archaeological field camp, 32 kilometers downriver at the Rubelsanto oil camp and military base, began calling me *Beel Búfalo* (Buffalo Bill). Meanwhile, all of my Maya Indian friends and workmen had long since been referring to me as *Obregón el Bigotón*.<sup>10</sup>

After nine consecutive months of fieldwork in the jungle without letup, and the same length of time away from my girlfriend/future wife, when the rainy season of 1978 began I took a break and headed north to Mexico to reunite with my long-suffering better half. My intention was to show her around Central Mexico, then return to Guatemala, where she would stay in my jungle field camp, marveling at the splendors of my unspoiled tropical rain forest home for a few weeks while I got back to work.

### Conclusion

Unfortunately, my girlfriend literally "freaked out" at the Mexico City airport when she saw my big *bigotes*. She refused to kiss me until the hairy barrier to osculation had been

## End Notes

removed. Protesting that I was in the running for “best mustache in the country” was to no avail. As every happily-married man knows, be he *cowboy of science* or cellar-dwelling historian, the secret to connubial bliss is a simple two-or-four word utterance: “Yes, dear,” or, “I tremblingly obey, dear.” So in Mexico City Samson surrendered to Delilah; I cut back my prize-winning *bigotes* until both lips were not only *visible*, but, for the first time in almost a year, *kissable*.

We returned to my field camp from Mexico, and all of my supporters were profoundly disappointed that I had voluntarily withdrawn from the Rubios best mustache competition. Worse was to come: I had been singing the praises of my tropical paradise field camp to my Hawaiian-born girlfriend in letter after letter (howler monkeys serenading us to sleep at night, scarlet macaws escorting us up and down the river overhead, etc.) and expected her to love the place just as much as I did. But she rushed through the jungle from my boat on the river to my hilltop field camp on her very first day, and never ventured outside for three solid weeks. Christening me *King of Bug City*, she unfairly (at least in my opinion) compared the tropical Maya lowlands with Hawaii, noting that her own birthplace had no malaria, poisonous snakes, *caimanes*, *chiquirines* (flying insects large enough to shoot with a rifle),<sup>11</sup> nor communist guerrillas, unlike my own beloved jungle home.

I gave up my big *bigotes* in 1978, and my long-suffering girlfriend got me to quit smoking the following year. Finally, with enough “yes, dears” deposited in the matrimonial bank, she consented to make our common-law-since-1975-union legal in the eyes of God, man, and pencil-pushing bureaucrats two years later still, in 1981. So, in retrospect, I may have lost the best *mustache* in the country competition 45 years ago, but I won the best *wife* in any country competition. After 48 years together, and now counting down towards that “Big 50” mark right around the corner, giving up both *coughin’ nails* and big *bigotes* seems a small price to pay for such a happy ending to this long, if not learned, story.

1. **Bigotes:** (bee-goh-tayze) is Spanish for mustache, more accurately plural mustachios. In Latin American Spanish vernacular a man with a big mustache is a *Bigotón*.
2. **Custer Shoots and Kills his own Horse at the Gallop:** this was not a gun “accident.” There are no such things, since accidents are unavoidable—lighting strikes, falling trees, etc.—what used to be called “acts of God.” Unintentional firearms discharges are never *accidental* since they can always be prevented by proper gun-handling: they are always the inevitable result of *negligence*. Had Custer shot himself that day, instead of his mount, there might never have been a Battle of the Little Big Horn.
3. **Cowboys of Science Say Make Mine Mules:** Dillon 2019.
4. **Cowboys of Science and the Million Mile Chevy:** Dillon 2020.
5. **Tobacco:** was an ancient AmerIndian cultivated crop, present prehistorically in both Central and North America. It was not only smoked, but also burned as a sacrament along with other kinds of incense, most notably *copál*, made from pine-pitch, at many different kinds of ceremonies. Artistic depictions of tobacco smoking go back at least 1700 years in Maya art, and it is likely that tobacco use is much older than that. It is often said in anthropological circles that if the worst “gifts” the White man gave the American Indian were alcohol and alcoholism, malaria, measles, smallpox, etc., then a small measure of revenge was exacted by AmerIndians who returned the favor with syphilis and tobacco. Another favorite anthropological saying is that only a single human generation after 1492, these two retaliations had become so common throughout Europe that even the Pope died of syphilis, his Roman death-bed perfumed by tobacco smoke. Pundits claimed this a miraculous case of *immaculate infection*.
6. **Chewing Tobacco:** some of my “urban cowboy” bull-riding buddies a half-century ago took up *dippin’ Skoal* as a means of enhancing their rodeo *bona fides*. I never understood the appeal of carrying around a Dixie cup to spit into, so consequently I never developed

that white circle on the back pocket of my Levi's. Previous generations of my own family however, *chewed* and I can still recall, from exactly 60 years ago, the discovery of a cut-plug of Day's Work chewing tobacco atop a shelf in my grandmother's basement. Missing one corner, with a perfect impression of my grandfather's (1869-1938) front teeth, it was still half-covered by its original wrapper.

7. **Smoking "for Health:"** as far as I know, nobody has ever done a study of the incidence of malarial infection amongst non-smokers vs smokers. Nevertheless, all Maya and Maya archaeologists who have ever suffered from malaria can attest that *Anopheles* mosquitos will not penetrate clouds of tobacco smoke to suck the smoker's blood, preferring to land instead on the skin of the nearest non-smoker. I contracted malaria in Guatemala either in 1976 or '77, and suffered attacks from it annually for 30 years afterwards, so this observation is not theoretical.
8. **Daily Wages in Central America:** In 1977, on our National Geographic Society-sponsored archaeological project on the South Coast of Guatemala, we paid our Mam Maya workmen the local rate of \$1.27 per day. Later that same year, on my Fulbright-sponsored archaeological project in the northern jungles of Guatemala, I paid my Kekchí Maya workmen \$3.00 per day. All of us *gringo* archaeologists on both projects, of course, worked *pro bono*.
9. **Ladino:** is Guatemalan Spanish for "non-Indian." It is a cultural, rather than a racial, term in the country where by any estimate 60 to 80% of the population is *racially* Indian, but perhaps only 50% now is *culturally* Indian, retaining their native language, religion, ethnically-specific dress, etc. The old Spanish word comes from *Moros Latinados*, coined more than a thousand years ago on the Iberian Peninsula. It referred to Christianized Moors, who had given up Islam and sworn allegiance to the various Christian kings of the different Spanish Kingdoms. In modern-day Central America, the common saying is that if an *Indian* wants to become a *Ladino*, he simply puts on shoes, and moves to the city. In Guatemala "Indio," is pejorative, and never used: Indians are *Naturales*.
10. **Obregón:** is the Mexican Spanish rendering

of the Irish O'Brien/O'Brian name. It is the patronymic of the beloved hero and martyr Álvaro Obregón (1880-1928) the only Mexican President of Irish descent. I was named for him since my father's Master's Thesis in Mexican history at U.C. Berkeley, completed shortly before my birth, was a study of Obregón's remarkable military and political career.

11. **Big Bugs:** I may be the only archaeologist to have ever shot these giant flying insects with a .22 rifle.

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# Monthly Roundup . . .



December 14, 2022

Steve Lech

December's Roundup saw the L.A. Corral welcome guest speaker Steve Lech as he took us back almost a hundred years before tens of thousands of people flocked to the Coachella Valley for the biggest music festival in the world. Mr. Lech introduced us to a woman named Susie Keef Smith (1900-1988), who created photographic postcards of this majestic California desert landscape.

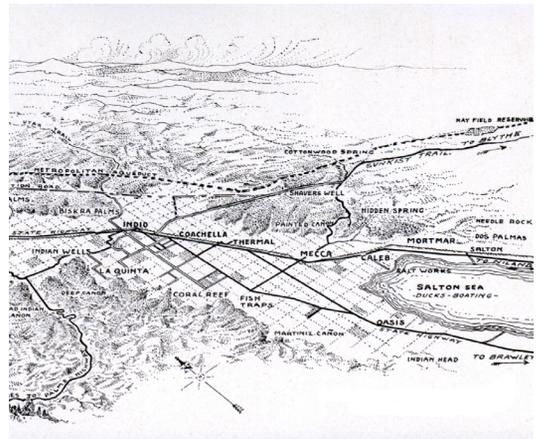
Susie's love for photography began as a child when she contracted polio at the age of twelve. Her uncle gifted her a large format camera to use while she was confined to a wheelchair. Through perseverance and to doctors' amazement, she began to walk again. In 1926 with encouragement from her father, Susie became the postmaster of Mecca, California. During the 1920s many Americans had an image of the California deserts as desolate wastelands with no vegetation. This is why they were commonly

known as the "Devil's Garden." Most people were unaware of the attractions of the Joshua trees, or the dazzling Salton Sea. Susie began to take photographs of the desert landscape which propelled her to the forefront of the golden age of postcards.

During this era Susie encouraged people to travel out west to see the California Desert for themselves. Susie captured photos for postcards by traveling through the desert on a Ford Model T Truck, that was given to Susie by her father on one condition: that she disassemble the vehicle and put it back together again. This she accomplished, and it started on the first crank, proving her skills as a motorist.

Photographic postcards were great for advertising the land and for people to write to each other. This form of postcards created a medium that encouraged people to venture out to the California desert. The routes Susie chose to photograph were attractive to travelers because this was during the time the Colorado River Aqueduct was being built. The aqueduct channeled water through the desert thus enabling desert communities to become popular vacation destinations. The best-known example was Palm Springs. Smith took pictures of the aqueduct construction workers and their equipment. Susie's photos allowed people to visually grasp the mystic beauties of the desert landscape. A large number of the locations Susie photographed are now part of the Coachella Valley Preserve.

— Darran Davis





**January 11, 2023**

Ira Pemstein

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum is located on a steep hill through the Santa Susana Pass in beautiful Simi Valley, California. It began its mission in 1991 to preserve all of Ronald Reagan's presidential and personal belongings. The Reagan Library and Museum's claim to fame is the Air Force One Boeing 707 that former President Reagan himself flew on. The speaker at the Westerners' January 2023 Roundup, Supervisory Archivist Ira Pemstein, provided a unique insiders' perspective into the workings of this remarkable institution.

The presidential library system developed gradually over time. Initially, presidential records were a former president's personal property after his tenure of office, unless voluntarily given to the government as a deed of gift. The handling of records became more formalized with the Presidential Libraries Act of 1955. This act meant that once a president constructed his own building, the National Archives could donate the former president's work to the library. The second law which came in 1978 was the Presidential Records Act, which specifically required all of former President Richard Nixon's records

to remain in Washington D.C., and not be taken anywhere outside of fifty miles from the capital. The Presidential Records Act also transferred ownership of all documents acquired or created during a presidential term to the federal government, to be managed by the National Archives. Ronald Reagan was the first president to be affected by this law, and all the libraries since Reagan have fallen under the Presidential Records Act.

The Freedom of Information Act allows the public to request specific documents from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Most of the records predate the internet and are paper-based, and have yet to be digitized. Some of the archives are preserved in airtight containers and folders, or are refrigerated. Everything mentioned about the president by the three major broadcasting networks were recorded by the White House, including all the debates, campaign events, and Bob Hope specials. The Audio-Visual Archivist oversees photographs, film reels, and audio and video cassettes. The original formats can be viewed on VHS players and film projectors, which are preserved just as carefully as the forty-year-old media that they play.

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library has 65 million pages of documents that cover Reagan's entire life, as well as two-thirds of his career in Hollywood and his term as the Governor of California. The family-operated Ronald Reagan Foundation supplements areas that the federal government cannot, because the material from before and after his presidency does not belong to the federal government. Here is where the Reagan Foundation and the federal government come together. The Reagan family has custody and ownership of the pre- and post-presidential items that are housed at the Ronald Reagan Library and the federal government serves them to the public with the family's permission.

— Darran Davis



**February 8, 2023**

Brian Dervin Dillon

Firearms history through the lens of multiple generations of shooting Dillons. That was our treat in February, as the L.A. Corral's own Dr. Brian Dillon regaled attendees with a swift, yet detailed, overview of the "shoot-in' irons" of Western American history. From the smooth-bore matchlocks of Spanish first contact, to the modern, rifled auto-loaders of the 20th century, the guns that won the West ranged far beyond just the famed 1873 Winchester. We were pleasantly reminded of this fact by the variety of arms, and the folks who wielded them, presented by our eminently qualified former sheriff, and firearms instructor, Brian Dillon.

The aforementioned matchlocks may have been the first firearms present on the continent, but as Spain decided to leave, and stay gone, for a few centuries after their initial introduction in the North, these early irons had no impact on the history of the American West. Rather it was the muskets and rifles of the late 18th and early 19th centuries that first ventured into the West. Lewis and Clark's expedition made use of later flintlock technology on their epic foray into the new American frontier; the first significant use of firearms west of the Mississippi.

Intrepid trappers, late of the old frontiers in what we now call the Southeast, were among the first to put long irons to use in the further reaches of the West. American adventurers in these early days preferred Pennsylvania rifles, while Canadians push-

ing west were more known for their use of smooth-bore muskets. The newly-invented percussion cap was too expensive and scarce to be of much utility in the unsettled country, and flintlocks remained in significant use by self-reliant types well into the middle of the 19th century.

The Gold Rush created a huge demand for iron in California, particularly of the defensive variety (after all, nobody will protect your claim but you). Use of the percussion cap quickly made revolvers the standard sidearm of every hunter, trapper, and miner in the rough new country. Perhaps the most iconic arm of the Gold Rush was the 1851 Colt Navy revolver. Six shots ready at the hip were invaluable in this lawless land.

The next major development in firearms was the metallic cartridge. Waterproof and durable, it made reloading a snap, and allowed for reliable mechanisms beyond the revolving cylinder to be used in chambering rounds. One such mechanism was the unforgettable lever action. Patented in 1854 by the Volcanic Repeating Arms Co., it evolved into the action used in the Winchester Model 1873, fabled as "The Gun that Won the West."

Smokeless powder followed as the next significant leap in the technology of shooting irons, and its introduction heralded the end of the Old West. The Krag-Jorgensen was the first gun adopted by the U.S. military to utilize smokeless powder. There was no turning back from here, and on came the 1903 Springfield of WWI fame, followed by the Colt M1911. A thoroughly modern self-loading pistol, the 1911 represented the end of Old West arms, as by the time of its adoption, the West had largely been won.

The history of the American West can be described fairly thoroughly by telling the history of its weapons. Likewise, the history of American firearms can be largely understood through examination of our country's westward expansion. And to have those descriptions provided by a compatriot whose ancestors were present on both avenues of that historical journey is a privilege we Westerners should relish. Many thanks to Brian for this presentation.

— Alan Griffin

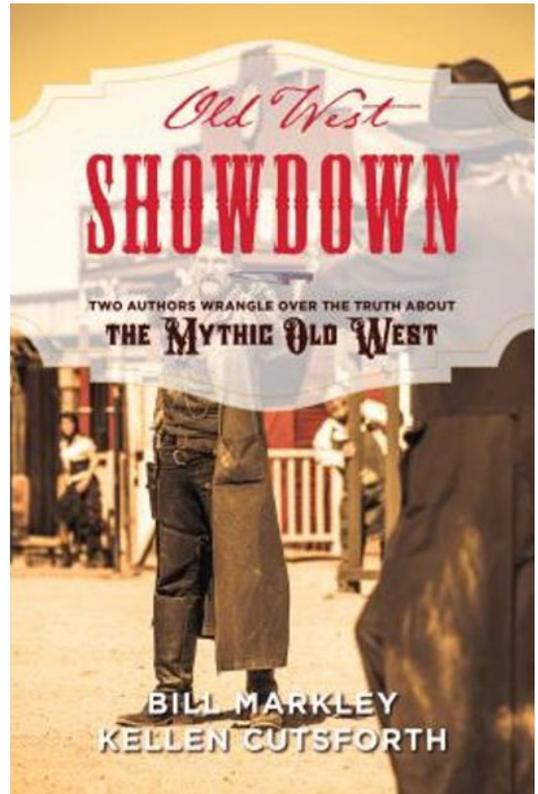
# Down the Western Book Trail . . .

*OLD WEST SHOWDOWN: Two Authors Wrangle over the Truth About the Mythic Old West*, by Bill Markley and Kellen Cutsforth. Lanham, MD: The Rowan & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc. 2022. 192 pp. Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index, Hardbound.

One of the major concerns of historians, who write about events that often happened long before they were born, is finding out the true story of what really happened or the sequence of occurrences (some very small and insignificant at the time) that led up to that particular time when a “historical event” transpired. Such is the main interest of historians and writers who try to explain all the facts and all the feelings of the individuals involved in specific “historical events.” It is easy to note that there are always two sides to every story. Bill Markley and Kellen Cutsforth, bring both sides of selected Western events to further explain what really happened. The historical events they write about are well known, and each one has an individual chapter of the book that tells the whole story or as the cover jacket states, “The Truth About the Mythic Old West.”

What makes the book fun and an easy read is that every person who has ever read any Western history or seen any Western movie knows about Wyatt Earp and the O.K. Corral; Calamity Jane; Custer and the Little Big Horn; Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid; Crazy Horse, Geronimo, et.al. Does the book settle on any verifiable truths (what really happened and who was at fault) regarding these events? No! But it does bring together both sides of the discussion on how, why, and just what happened at these singular historical happenings that took place during the latter half of the 1800s, during the westward movement and the settlement of the United States.

Although the writers try to bring both points of view, or each side of the historical debate into play, they cannot, as so many historians have tried, bring in those special emotions that each individual had at the



exact moment the historical event took place. A look, a gesture, a curse word, or a quick movement by any of the individuals involved can actually change the course of history. The intentions of each individual at that moment cannot be really understood. When an explosion of gunfire breaks out at the O.K. Corral, there is little time to think of why at that precise moment the guns were fired. It is for the historians to review all the facts and explain each circumstance without prejudice. It will be noted here that in the 1993 movie, *Tombstone*, the actual fight began when Doc Holliday grinned, and winked at one of the McLaury's.

Even if the Earps and Clanton-McLaury exchange had been filmed at the exact moment when gunfire erupted, the participant feelings of the moment can never be fully known. When the event is finished, it is up to the historians to paint the best and most accurate picture of what really

happened. Markley and Cutsforth do a good job of recreating the events and providing the reader with pertinent facts. It is still up to the reader to assemble the facts that are given and make a final determination as to why things ended the way they did.

*Old West Showdown* is really the story of the failings of men and women. By circumstance the individuals discussed in each chapter had personality traits that led to a famous historical event. These traits were sometimes very good as when George Armstrong Custer daringly led his cavalry into a much superior force of mounted soldiers led by Confederate General J. E. B. Stuart, during the Civil War Battle of Gettysburg. But these traits could also lead the same man into a charge at the Battle of the Little Big Horn that was disastrous to all those involved.

Individuals involved in these Western historical events all had strong personalities and character flaws that played significant roles in circumstances that produced more questions than answers. Strong, complex characters are often difficult to define in a quick showdown or controversial event. The times in which these participants lived were also difficult and fast-changing. Changing values, standards, quality of life, war, and societal influences, often put people into a circumstance that was not easily solved. Markley and Cutsforth have researched the times, and the incidences in which these celebrated individuals found themselves and do more than an adequate job of examining the facts and explaining the outcomes with abundant footnotes and supporting materials.

— Gary Turner

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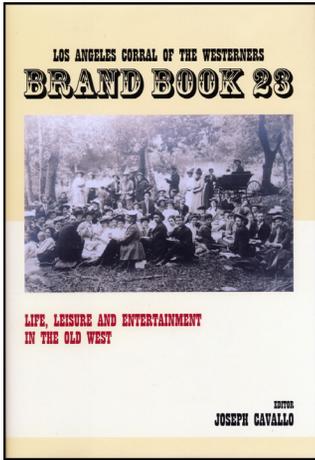
## Special Issue *Branding Irons*, Coming Soon!



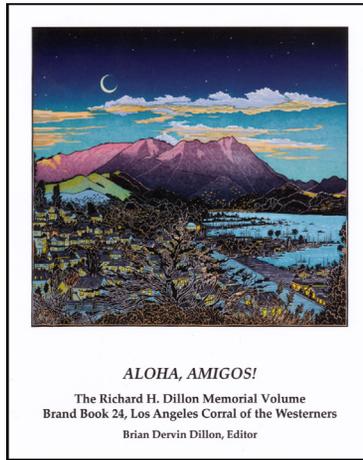
It's time to "Draw!" at high noon! Our next special themed issue of *The Branding Iron* for Spring 2023 will explore all things guns and gunslingers in the Old West. The next special issue for Winter 2024 will swap out our sidearms for spoons, as we sink our teeth into Western culinary history. Dig in!

To be considered for publication in these special issues, please observe a deadline of May 15th, 2023, for *shootin' iron*-themed articles, and a date of February 15th, 2024 for submissions about *cookin' irons*. Additionally, articles on other topics are always welcome and encouraged for future non-themed issues.

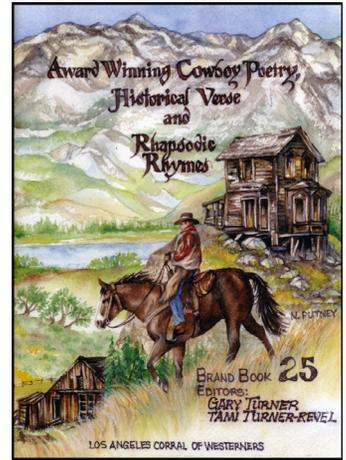
For submissions and inquiries, please contact *Branding Iron* editor John Dillon at [John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com](mailto:John.Dervin.Dillon@gmail.com). Thank you!



Brand Book 23, 2019



Brand Book 24, 2020



Brand Book 25, 2022

## Los Angeles Corral Brand Books for Order

Brand Book 23, *Life, Leisure, and Entertainment in the Old West*, edited by Joseph Cavallo, was the first Los Angeles Corral Brand Book to appear after a very long, 15-year, hiatus. It re-established the Los Angeles Corral as a literary leader amongst Westerners International organizations around the world. Its ten chapters are on topics as diverse as Wild West shows, Hollywood's take on the "old west," a multicultural review of western music spanning four centuries, prostitution in far-western timberlands, even motorcycle racing more than a century ago. Hardbound, illustrated, 309 pages, 2019.

Brand Book 24, *Aloha, Amigos!*, edited by Brian Dervin Dillon, is the *Richard H. Dillon Memorial Volume*. Dick Dillon (1924-2016) was a world-famous western historian, librarian, teacher, and public speaker. He was the single most productive historical writer on California and the American West, who published dozens of full-length books, hundreds of scholarly journal and popular magazine articles, and thousands of book reviews over a longer period of time (82 years) than any other writer. Richard H. Dillon was a long-time member of both the Los Angeles and the San Francisco Corrals of Westerners International, and was made a W.I. Living Legend in 2003. *Aloha Amigos!* Won the Westerner's International Best Book Award in 2021. It features the first-ever biography of Richard H. Dillon, culture-historical studies and paeans by his friends, colleagues, and admirers, and the first comprehensive bibliography of his published works. Hardbound, illustrated, 588 pages, 2020.

Brand Book 25, *Award Winning Cowboy Poetry, Historical Verse, and Rhapsodic Rhymes*, edited by Gary Turner and Tami Turner-Revel, has been recently published. It is the first full-length book of poetry ever published by any of the 70+ Westerners Corrals around the world, and is beautifully illustrated with original artwork by renowned western artist Nancy Putney. Brand Book 25 reprises poems that won the Fred Olds Cowboy Poetry Award from Westerners International between 2007 and 2019, as well as brand-new offerings published for the very first time. Hardbound, illustrated, 368 pages, 2022.

All three *Brand Books* are available to order for \$30.00 each (includes tax and postage) from our website: <http://www.lawesterners.org/brand-books/>

