

Heritage Highlights

“Owen Wister and the Wild West” Symposium Held

The American Heritage Center recently hosted its 11th annual symposium “Owen Wister and the Wild West.” Co-sponsored by the University of Wyoming’s American Studies Program, the conference explored the legacy of Wister and his famous novel, *The Virginian*, first published in 1902.

That famous novel is widely considered to be the prototypical American Western novel. Wister (1860-1937) was born to wealthy parents in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Between 1885 and 1895 he traveled extensively in Wyoming and the West. He kept detailed diaries during these trips. Drawing upon material collected in his travels, Wister created a tough, yet genteel, Southern born ranch hand who came to be known as the Virginian. Between 1892 and 1902 Wister wrote a series of short stories about this character which were published in *Harper’s Monthly* magazine. In 1902 he tied these short stories together to create his famous novel. The book was an immediate best seller and its influence upon the Western genre continues to be felt to this day.

One of the highlights of the symposium was the talk presented by John W. Stokes, Wister’s grandson. Stokes spoke about his personal relationship with his grandfather and the importance of Wister’s writings. He also discussed how Wister’s many hand-written diaries came to be placed in the American Heritage Center. Stokes’ entire talk is reprinted in this issue of *Heritage Highlights*.

Other papers presented during the symposium explored the friendship between Wister and Theodore Roosevelt, visual representations



D.C. Thompson, arrangement and description manager for the American Heritage Center, presenting her paper “The Virginian Meets Matt Shepard: Myth-Making in the West” at the AHC’s symposium “Owen Wister and the Wild West.”

of the West, dime novels, other western writers such as Mary O’Hara and Jack Schaefer, and other myths as presented in the paper “*The Virginian Meets Matt Shepard: Myth-Making in the West.*”

The AHC’s twelfth annual symposium will be held September 17-19, 2003, and will be sponsored by the Alan K. Simpson Institute for Western Politics and Leadership. The theme for the conference will be the influence of western politicians on national issues. ■

From the Director



Mark Greene

It is a bit daunting to be writing about the AHC to an audience almost all of whom have been connected to the Center in one way or another far longer than I have been. After three months, I am only beginning to learn the ropes here and at the university in general. However, there are at least two things I think I know very well already: 1) the staff here are fiercely committed to what, in archives and library parlance, is referred to as outreach—connecting, directly or indirectly, the historical sources in our care with as wide and varied an audience as possible; 2) the programs at the AHC are simply unparalleled in their successful efforts to make the collections an active part of the educational experience at the university, and an accessible and vital resource for K-12 students across the state.

Historical repositories like the AHC have traditionally been identified first and foremost with their collections. And certainly, our mission is to select carefully and critically documentary material that can provide meaningful and useful access to the history of the West and the United States. Our goal is to make this material a visible, vital, and accessible resource for students, scholars, and the public. Not a dusty attic or a formidable club, the AHC is a welcoming, lively place where both experts and novices work with the original sources of history.

Our success can be measured, in part, in statistics. Last year researchers represented forty-eight states and twenty-one nations, including Australia, Germany, Botswana, Brazil, and Russia. Just as importantly, our reference and Toppan Library staffs hosted more than one hundred university and public school classes for orientations, tours, and bibliographic instruction. These figures compare favorably to—and sometimes outshine—the success of many other world-class historical centers at universities far larger and better known than the AHC and the University of Wyoming, including some Big Ten and Ivy League schools. It is

our staff and the outreach programs they create and implement that mean most to the success of the AHC.

Of course, there is always more we can do. One of our increasingly important outreach tools is our web page (www.uwyo.edu/ahc), and a new task force has been appointed to expand the content and improve the navigation of our site—look for those changes before the middle of next year. We are also strengthening our relationship with the UW Outreach School, to better publicize our existing public programs and to develop distance education units for baccalaureate, associate, and K-12 students throughout Wyoming (and indeed across the nation).

And while I will have occasion to say more about this in the spring, we have made access to our collections one of the key goals of our part of the university's "*DISTINCTION: The Campaign for Wyoming's University*." The campaign is an unprecedented fundraising effort targeted at strengthening those programs that bring UW national and international distinction, and, of course, the AHC is one of those programs. One of the Center's four main fundraising goals is the creation of an endowment to support acquisition of and access to collections. If you would like additional information about this effort, or if you would like to contact me for any reason, please feel free to do so at mgreen@uwyo.edu or 307-766-2474.

I would like to close with a brief personal note. At its meeting this summer, the AHC Board of Associates formally thanked Rick Ewig for his tremendous service as acting and interim director, and presented him with a framed Grace Raymond Hebard map. I want to express publicly my own gratitude to and admiration for Rick and his leadership of the Center. He has been unstinting in his willingness to share his knowledge and expertise with me, and I am fortunate to have the advantage of his counsel. The AHC is privileged—I know I am—to have the benefit of his energy, talent, and dedication. ■

—Mark Greene

Reflections on Owen Wister and *The Virginian*

By John W. Stokes

(This talk was presented at the AHC's symposium, "Owen Wister and the Wild West." Mr. Stokes is Owen Wister's grandson.)

Thank you to Rick Ewig for inviting me to this symposium. It is exciting to play a role in discussing the Wister legacy. It is a pleasure and a little daunting to be speaking to so many Wister devotees and scholars. I can only assume that each of you know more than I do about my grandfather, which is a bit humbling.

Let me say at the outset, I agree with the comments on the last picture in your wonderful Owen Wister photographic exhibit on display in your museum downstairs. "Regardless of one's opinion about the book, *The Virginian* has stood the test of time as the prototype western novel." The fact we are all here today certainly supports this conclusion.

Before I discuss Wister's work and the 100th Anniversary of *The Virginian* from my perspective, I would like to offer a few reflections on his personal life away from the West and one of his other books. First, a few facts to put his life in perspective. I did not know my grandfather well. My role was to deliver the mail to him each morning at his summer home, Crowfield in Saunderstown, Rhode Island. He died when I was six years old in July 1938. To me, he was a large and friendly man. (However, when you are six grown-ups tend to look big.) He loved Saunderstown and spent forty summers there with his family.

Wister was born in 1860 outside of Philadelphia. He attended Saint Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, graduating in 1878 and then went on to Harvard College. He graduated from Harvard in 1882—summa cum laude in music. There he was a member of the Porcellian Club where he became a great friend of fellow member Theodore Roosevelt. Wister planned a career in music following his graduation. His grandmother, the famous Shakespearean actress and abolitionist, Fanny Kemble, arranged for him to play one of his compositions for Franz Liszt who told her Wister had pronounced talent. Wister's father



persuaded him not to pursue a career in music but instead go to Harvard Law School. He entered in 1885 and graduated in 1888, accepting a law position in Philadelphia.

In the mid 1880s due to ill health, Wister's doctor advised him to go west. He made 10 trips from 1885-1895 keeping detailed diaries of everything he saw and all the people he met. These diaries formed the basis for his western stories and *The Virginian*. The diaries were given to the University of Wyoming by my mother, Fanny Kemble Wister Stokes.

To digress for a moment, some of you may know it was a former librarian of this university, N. Orwin Rush, who in 1951 prompted my mother to find her father's western journals. In preparation for the 50th anniversary of *The Virginian*, Mr. Rush had written to her asking for the diaries. She replied that none of the family had heard anything about them. Mr. Rush then wrote again to my mother quoting a reference from Owen Wister's book about Theodore Roosevelt: "Upon every Western expedition I had kept a full, faithful, realistic diary: details

John W. Stokes presenting his "Reflections on Owen Wister and The Virginian."

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about pack horses, camps in the mountains, camps in sage brush, nights in town, cards with cavalry officers..."

The diaries, untouched for sixty-five years, were readily found in Wister's desk on the second floor of his Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, house. Though the Library of Congress wanted them, my mother gave them with pleasure to the University of Wyoming. They also served as the basis for her best selling book, *Owen Wister Out West*.

Now let me return to Wister's life. Wister married his second cousin, Mary Channing Wister from Boston, in 1898. In the summer of 1899 Wister, newly married, came to Saunderstown for the first time and moved with his wife into a house at 25 Waterway in the village. The Wisters were very happy in Saunderstown. They came for the quiet life, the wonderful salt air, swimming, croquet, and horseback riding. Importantly, many Philadelphia friends were nearby, such as the Biddles, Bories, and Whartons.

My mother was born in the Waterway house in 1901 with her twin brother, Owen. The Wisters lived there with an ever-growing menagerie of animals; including a mockingbird, named Gabriel, and a team of harnessed goats to pull wagons for the children.

In the summer of 1907 T.R. with his entourage came to visit the Wisters. My Uncle Karl, then four years old, answered the door. T.R. said, "Tell your father the President is here." Uncle Karl responded, "The President of what?" (It's wonderful how we grown-ups can learn humility from a child.)

That year the Wisters and great family friend, Mrs. Walter Cope, who had children about the same age as the Wister children, purchased over one hundred acres together overlooking Narragansett Bay. The property was named Crowfield so the Seaview Railroad (in fact a trolley), running from Wickford to Wakefield, could stop at the foot of the hill to pick up passengers from the Cope and Wister households. Grant Lafarge, the son of the

famous stained glass artist, John Lafarge, was the architect of his house, which was completed in 1910. He too had been west and shared Wister's love for it.

Shortly after Wister's new house was built, Henry James, a great friend of the family, wrote to him to say how sorry he was he could not be in Saunderstown with the Wisters and "their graceful ring of friends."

Sometime later, another family friend and intellectual wag, Leonard Bacon, wrote his perception of the scene in Saunderstown.

Hey, diddle diddle
The Cope and the Biddle
To Saunderstown we go!
With the Whartons and Bories
All in their glories
And Wisters all in a row...

Nothing is soldier
Than the Cadwalader
Nothing is brainier
Than Pennsylvanian
God reign on Rittenhouse Square!

Life at Crowfield was full for the Wister and Cope children. Cows to milk, chickens and horses to care for, music, French and German lessons, and swimming on their own beach. We have a picture of the Crowfield Orchestra with the young Wister and Cope children and their music teacher. Every summer this little orchestra performed at the firehouse in Saunderstown for \$.25 per person to raise money for the firemen.

The Wister House was always full of music and Owen Wister generally played the piano every evening. My mother told me her favorite song of his, as a child, was:

"Here I come dum de dum
I'm a plum, dum de dum
My appearance puts others on the bum."

As a major literary figure, Wister's life in the early 1900s was intertwined with many well-known literary and artistic personalities.

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Henry James, as I mentioned, was a close friend. Others included: Ernest Hemingway, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells, Rudyard Kipling, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Frederic Remington, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, and Edith Wharton. Of particular interest to me was Hemingway. Wister met Ernest Hemingway in Shell, Wyoming, in 1928. They went fishing and shooting together and became close friends as they respected each other's work. Hemingway saw himself as an apprentice to the elder statesman, Wister. They discussed *A Farewell to Arms*, which Hemingway was working on at that time. Some weeks later, recognizing that Hemingway was short on cash, Wister sent him an unsolicited check for \$500. Shortly afterwards, Hemingway returned the check, which he had not cashed, because his advance for *A Farewell to Arms* had arrived.

Wister participated actively in the world around him and voiced his views on many national issues. He had a number of prestigious appointments and honors. Among them, he was an Overseer of Harvard College for many years, President of the Tavern Club in Boston for which he wrote several operas, and President of the Philadelphia Club.

Owen Wister had one other best selling novel, though less successful than *The Virginian*. It was a Victorian romance set in Charleston, South Carolina, and published in 1906 called, *Lady Baltimore*. Today it is best remembered for the famous Lady Baltimore cake, which is a centerpiece of the plot. *The New York Times* heralded the cake in a two-page spread this past April titled, "Rich and Famous." *Lady Baltimore* is very important to me as my grandfather used the proceeds from the book to build his summer home, which we have named, Wister House.

In the book the cake is the center of a love triangle with Eliza La Hue, a sweet, pure young woman, who makes the cake for a tea shoppe and John Myrant, a handsome and principled young man of promise, who ordered the cake from Eliza for his wedding to Hortense Rieppi.

She is a young woman who smokes, kisses boys, and goes to fast parties in New York and Newport. When all the crumbs have settled, Hortense gets a wheeler-dealer from New York with a yacht and John gets Eliza, the cake, and happiness forever.

Now let me turn to *The Virginian*. Owen Wister started writing his short western stories to save the sagebrush in literature before it disappeared with the rapid expansion westward at the turn of the century. His own description of how it happened is in his book, *Roosevelt, A Story of a Friendship*.

"And so one autumn evening of 1891, fresh from Wyoming and its wild glories, I sat in the Club (Philadelphia) dining with a man as enamored of the West as I was. This was Walter Furness... From oysters to coffee we compared experiences. Why wasn't some Kipling saving the sagebrush for American literature before the sagebrush and all that it signifies went the way of the California

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During his visit to the American Heritage Center, John W. Stokes visited the reading room and enjoyed looking at Owen Wister's original diaries from the 1880s and 1890s.

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forty niner, went the way of the Mississippi steam-boat, went the way of everything? Roosevelt had seen the sagebrush true, had felt its poetry; and also Remington who illustrated his articles so well. But what was fiction doing, fiction the only thing that always outlived fact?" "Walter, I am going to try it myself," Wister exclaimed to Walter Furness.

After that Wister went upstairs at the Philadelphia Club to a small study and started writing his first short story, "Hank's Woman." It was published in *Harper's* magazine in 1892.

Earlier this year I reread *The Virginian* with much pleasure. The fact the story held up so well and was not dated came as a surprise to me. I loved the dialogue and vivid descriptive passages. Having sold well over two million copies, been reprinted more than fifty times, and made into a movie five times, *The Virginian* clearly was a literate blockbuster.

Today, at its 100th Anniversary *The Virginian* has done much more than save the memory of the sagebrush. To discuss this let me turn to the *New York Times* book review, June 21, 1902. The reviewer recognized *The Virginian* would live on as a brilliant narrative.

"Owen Wister's Stirring Novel of
Western Life

Owen Wister has come pretty near to writing the American novel. He has come as near to it as any man can well come, and at the same time has beautifully demonstrated the futility of the expectation that the typical novel of American life will ever be written. Mr. Wister has set forth a phase of life which is to be found only in the United States, and has pictured it with graphic delineative force, with picturesqueness and with brilliant narrative power. The *Virginian* ought to live as an artistic embodiment of a man fast passing into a remembrance... "The *Virginian*" in a broad sense is a historical novel. It is a

study of men and times. It rings true, and we believe it to be a faithful study."

The key insights in my view are: "a phase of life which is to be found only in the United States" and "The *Virginian*" ought to live as "an embodiment of a species of man fast passing into remembrance."

It is generally acknowledged that *The Virginian* was the first nationally popular cowboy novel and the gold standard of western literature. It broke new ground by turning the cowboy from a villain and ruffian of the West into a hero. It portrayed, in realistic tones, the bold individual spirit, reminiscent of colonial times and carried underlying themes of democracy and equality throughout. Given these ingredients and a brilliant narrator, it is no wonder the book was such a tremendous hit.

Owen Wister contributed to our country much more than a popular romantic novel about the West. As we look around today, we see that the lore of the West is part of our everyday lives, not only in literature, but in clothing, food, and music. Importantly, the western culture is only one of three in our country, which are truly indigenous. The other two are jazz and the American musical. These also started in the early 20th century. All other cultures we share together come from other lands and were brought here from abroad as our country grew and prospered.

Men such as Buffalo Bill Cody and the dime novelist, Ned Buntline, popularized the West for their generation, but in my view *The Virginian* set the stage and guidelines for the development of our western culture and what one might call the code of the West. Would our romantic perceptions of the West be the same without *The Virginian*? Most likely not.

Our love of the West gives us all a common bond to share. Wister's cowboy has left us his unfettered entrepreneurial spirit and his true sense of self-reliance and personal honor. These live on with us today. It is a great legacy. Again, my thanks for letting me speak with you today. ■

New Wyoming History Day Coordinator Named

Terriale (T-Lee) Lankford has accepted the position of Wyoming History Day Coordinator and will organize the annual competition that involves many teachers and students from around the state. The American Heritage Center coordinates the annual scholastic event, in which more than one thousand students in grades six through twelve research topics of their choice and write papers, create exhibits and documentaries, and perform plays based on historical events. Students compete at district, state, and national levels. The Wyoming State Historical Society and the State Department of Parks and Cultural Resources sponsor the contest.

Lankford, a native of Laramie, received a B.A. in elementary education and an M.A. in

English at the University of Wyoming. She taught reading at Arapaho School in Fremont County and taught English for the Laramie County Community College Albany County Campus and UW.

Wyoming History Day is affiliated with National History Day, based at the University of Maryland-College Park. "Right and Responsibilities in History" is the theme for the 2003 contest. The state contest will be held at UW on April 28. Up to eighty Wyoming students will qualify for the national contest to be held June 15-19 at the University of Maryland.

For more information call Lankford at 307-766-2300, e-mail at lankford@uwyo.edu, or visit the web site at www.uwyo.edu/AHC/historyday. ■



T-Lee Lankford is the new coordinator for Wyoming History Day.

New Faculty

Shannon Bowen joined the American Heritage Center in January 2002 as Assistant Archivist responsible for the arrangement and description of environmental and conservation related collections. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Randolph-Macon Woman's College in 1996, specializing in American cultural history with emphasis on architectural history and historic preservation. After working for various cultural and natural resource management agencies, she entered the

graduate program in American Studies at the University of Wyoming. Her interest in public history and the built environment resulted in her assignment as a graduate assistant to work at the AHC on the papers of a Washington, D.C., planner, Frederick Gutheim. After completing the guide to the Gutheim papers, she worked on various projects at the AHC until the completion of her thesis and Masters degree in December 2001. ■



Shannon Bowen.

AHC Notes

Since joining the staff of the AHC on August 1, **Mark Greene** has been named a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). The distinction of Fellow is the highest honor bestowed on individuals by SAA and is awarded for outstanding contributions to the archival profession. In addition, at the annual conference of SAA held in August, Mark presented one of six special sessions aimed at bringing newcomers up to speed on basic archival processes. *The American Archivist* recently published Mark's article, "The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mis-

sion in the Postmodern Age." Also this fall, the president of SAA appointed Mark to chair the program committee for the organization's annual conference in 2004.

Leslie Shores, the AHC's photographic archivist, attended the Wyoming Library Association's annual conference in September and participated on a panel for a session titled "Making Good Library Displays Even Better." She also attended a workshop sponsored by SAA titled "Copyright: The Archivist and the Law."

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John Waggener was a guest presenter this semester to several university classes. He gave presentations on historic Wyoming maps to the UW Maps and Mapping class and spoke to the Introduction to Public History class. He also spoke to the Laramie Civic League, discussing the dos and don'ts of preserving family archives such as photographs, scrapbooks, and diaries.

Ginny Kilander, reference archivist, attended the International Marbler's gathering "Images, Surfaces, Devices" in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, in September. This was an international workshop, highlighting the history, development, and current trends in paper and fabric marbling. Some of Ginny's marbling work was displayed in the conference exhibit.

Assistant Archivist **Mark Shelstad** attended the fall meetings of the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists in Denver, Colorado, and the Midwest Archives Conference in Rapid City, South Dakota, in October. At the SRMA meeting he gave a presentation on creating print and Web-based guides and at the MAC meeting he taught a workshop on archival cataloging. Mark also attended the Summer Institute for Knowledge Sharing, sponsored by UCLA and the Getty Institute in Los Angeles in July.

Carol Bowers, the manager of the AHC's reference area, gave presentations on "Using Primary Documents" and "Preparing an Annotated Bibliography" for the Wyoming History Day Teachers'

Workshop held in Casper in October. She also guided a walking tour and gave a presentation on early Laramie history for the Laramie County Community College Wyoming History class.

Kim Winters, the archivist for the Alan K. Simpson Institute for Western Politics and Leadership, taught the university class "Introduction to American Studies" during the summer.

Anne Marie Lane, the AHC's curator of rare books, attended two meetings of the American Library Association (ALA), one in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the other in Atlanta, Georgia. She served as co-chair of ALA's Rare Books Security Committee and also chaired the public hearing in New Orleans for approval of the "Guidelines regarding theft in libraries."

Anne Guzzo, composer, musicologist, and AHC audio-visual archivist, presented "Cartoon Music Constructions: Kansas City Influences in the Music of Carl Stalling" at the national 2002 College Music Society Meeting in Kansas City in September. The AHC holds the papers of Carl Stalling.

Rick Ewig, the AHC's associate director, presented a paper, "Mining the Archives of the West," at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in August. He also participated in the Wyoming History Day Teacher's Workshop in October and earlier in the year was elected to a term on the Heart Mountain, Wyoming Foundation. ■

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