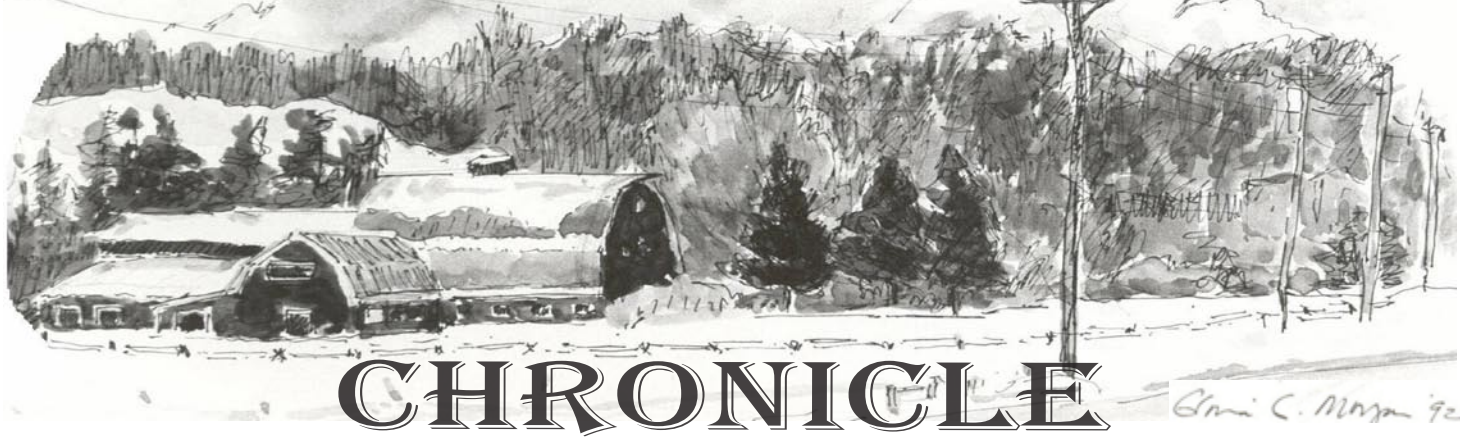


JACKSON HOLE

HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM



CHRONICLE

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JACKSON'S HOLE, WYOMING

FALL 2009

The article that follows was originally printed in the St. Paul's School Spring 2004 *Alumni Horae*—the School's quarterly news publication. St. Paul's School is a coed boarding school in Concord, New Hampshire.

The article discusses the life and literary legacy of my grandfather, Owen Wister. He is the author of the western novel, *The Virginian*, which portrayed the cowboy for the first time as a hero rather than as a villain. This introduction will highlight the strong ties my grandfather had to the Jackson Hole area.

As you will read, Wister went West at age 25 in 1885 for ten consecutive summers and kept detailed daily diaries of his trips and adventures. In these he captured the dialogue of the West as well as poetic description of its scenery.

In these years he journeyed to seven Western Territories. The area he visited most frequently was Wyoming. He wrote many diaries from the Jackson area. For example: the Wind River; the Snake River; the North and South Fork of the Snake River; Jackson Hole and Yellowstone Falls. Later in life, in 1911 he brought his wife and four children to



Francis Kemble Wister, daughter of Owen and mother of John W. Stokes, in 1911 at the JY Ranch. *American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming*

Jackson Hole and stayed for three months at the JY Ranch. In the summer of 1912 he returned to Jackson Hole again to live on a ranch he had purchased. There he and his family built a log cabin without help from any others.



Owen Wister's cabin on the Moose-Wilson Road, built in 1912.. 1958.1536.001

My mother was age ten when she first went West with her father. The days of living on a ranch in Jackson Hole with her siblings and parents left her a lifelong, indelible memory of warmth and joy, and an abiding love of the West.

In my article the photograph of the the camping scene took place in Jackson Hole in 1887. In it Wister is seen pouring whiskey into a cup held by Tigie, his Indian guide.

I hope you enjoy my article and agree with me that Owen Wister played an important role in developing our lasting and romantic perceptions of the West.

John W. Stokes
September 2, 2009

Wister's West

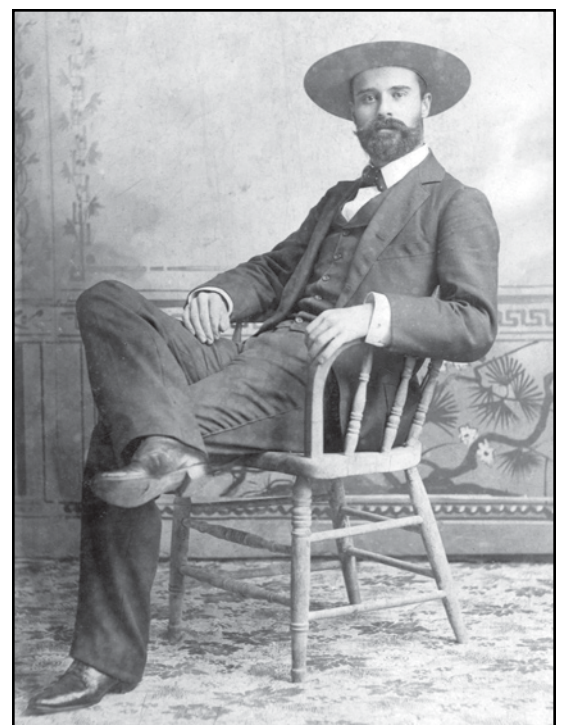
By John W. Stokes
(St. Paul's School 1950)
Grandson of Owen Wister
(St. Paul's School 1878)

The grandson of novelist Owen Wister reflects on the continuing legacy left by his grandfather's most famous book, The Virginian.

As a child I spent summers with my parents and sister in Saunderstown, R.I., in my grandfather's summer home, "Crowfield." Though he died in 1938 when I was very young, I remember him. However,

I was not really aware of his fame as an author until I was a young man. It was not until the spring of 2002, when my wife and I decided to have a benefit at "Crowfield" to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the publication of The Virginian, that I became aware of the impact the book has had in our country.

This article discusses how Wister, through The Virginian, has shaped our perception of the West and includes some anecdotes about Wister and his lifelong friendship with Theodore Roosevelt. As a brilliant, sophisticated Easterner, his contribution to defining the West is most surprising and unlikely. The Virginian is the seminal western novel. It was the first popular book which portrayed the cowboy as a romantic hero of the plains rather than a villain. The legacy of this book lives on in our western culture.



Owen Wister, taken in Yellowstone. *American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming*

Wister was born in 1860 into a prosperous Philadelphia family. His father was a successful doctor and his mother, Sarah Butler Wister, the intellectual daughter of the famous Shakespearean actress and abolitionist, Fanny Kemble.

He first came to Saunderstown in the summer of 1898 just after he was married. Wister had married his second

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Mission Statement

The Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum collects, interprets, and preserves our unique heritage in an engaging and enriching manner.



The *Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum Chronicle* is published quarterly for members and friends of the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum. Suggestions and comments are always welcome.

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Introducing...Our New Website!

We have a new website! Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum staff, aided greatly by Cognito Graphics of Jackson, has been working on the new site for a few months. Our new site address is www.museumofjacksonhole.com. Or search on "Jackson Hole history" and other related descriptors to find our website. Our old address also points to the new site. It's a huge improvement over our previous website—we think you'll enjoy it!

Visitors to our new site can easily locate historical society events and programs on our up-to-date calendar. We no longer have to wait for someone else to post our events and press releases but manage the website content ourselves.



Our new site includes a sampling of historic photographs available for reprint. Simply note the number of the photograph you want to order and call the historical society. We are happy to help add a bit of history to your home. Historic photographs make great gifts too!

In addition to historic photographs, short articles and interesting tidbits about Jackson Hole history give depth to the website. This is the perfect place to

direct your friends and family to give them background information about the area.

There are several ways you can become involved with the historical society through the website. You can join the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum, make a donation, request to be added to our e-mail mailing list, or find out how to become one of our esteemed volunteers. We look forward to hearing from you and welcome your feedback on our new website!

Larry Perlman Joins Board of Directors

Larry Perlman brings with him a wealth of experience as the newest member of our board of directors. Larry is the retired Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Control Data/Ceridian Corporation and the former Chairman of Seagate Technology. He has served on the boards of over twenty public corporations, several private corporations, and numerous nonprofit organizations. He is currently a director of the Jackson Center for the Arts and The Dancer's Workshop in Jackson.

He and his wife Linda Peterson Perlman live in Wilson on Fall Creek Road with their springer spaniel Theo. They spend about half their time in Jackson Hole, and the rest of their time is split between Indian Wells, California, and Minneapolis, Minnesota where Larry is originally from and where his two children and three grandchildren live. His interests include fishing, hiking, riding (he owns his own horse), skiing, golfing, bird hunting, trap shooting, and writing.

He has written his personal memoirs for his grandkids, and is finishing a mystery/romance novel.

Larry believes Jackson Hole is a wonderful place, and that the stories about the people who created it are fascinating and instructive. He is interested in historic preservation and says "there is a tension between development and preservation that is played out intensely here." As a board member he wants to learn and contribute to our efforts over time.



Welcome New Members (June, July, and August):

- Jim and Emily Ambler
- Bank of Jackson Hole
- Lucy Bayles
- Stacey Bradley
- Alan and Susan Bybee
- John Campbell
- Lora Childs
- Chris Coleman
- Shirley Craighead
- George and Frances Doran
- Bert and Jeanette Feuz
- Steve and Marilyn French
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- Heidi and Phil Leeds
- Anne Lippold
- Liz Parker and Mark Magyar
- Thomas Patricelli
- Susan Rauch
- Bartlett Saunders
- Anthony White
- Michael White

Thank you!

Historical Happenings

Join a Book Discussion Group

The Jackson Hole Historical Society & Museum and the Wyoming Humanities Council present "Living Between Fences"—a four-book discussion series this winter. The series will be held at Jackson's Old County Library, 320 S. King, 7-9 p.m. The Thursday discussion nights are January 21, February 11, March 4, and March 25.

Books in this year's series are: *House of Sand and Fog* by Andre Dubus; *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson; *Tortilla Curtain* by T.C. Boyle; and *The Work of Wolves* by Kent Meyer.

Jackson resident Dr. Stephen Lottridge will once again lead the discussions. He holds degrees in Slavic Languages and Literature from Columbia University and in psychology from the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology. The discussions are lively!

Registration is required as space is limited. Call the historical society at 733-9605 to sign-up. Books will be available at the historical society, 105 Mercill, by early January.

Thank you to all who donated to the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum through Old Bill's Fun Run!

Upcoming Events

Annual Meeting for Members Thursday, October 15, 2009

Potluck and Program
6:30 p.m.
St. John's Episcopal Church,
Hansen Hall
Please bring a dish to share and your table service.

Holiday Dinner Program Thursday, November 19, 2009

Potluck and Program
6:30 p.m.
Senior Center, 830 E. Hansen
Please bring a dish to share and your table service.

Old Tyme Christmas Program Thursday, December 3, 2009

Music, storytelling, and refreshments
7:00 p.m.
Wort Hotel, Jackson Room

Book Discussion Group Thursdays, January 21, February 11, 25, March 4, 2009

"Living Between Fences"
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Jackson's Old County Library,
320 S. King

Winter 2010
Storytelling Program Series
Details to be announced.

Thank you, Victoria!

While she is an unsung hero and often invisible contributor, Victoria Hess is the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum's official photograph doctor and scanning guru extraordinaire. She reproduces most of the photographs from our collection that are ordered for gifts, displayed in homes and businesses throughout the community, and are used in exhibits, documentaries and publications. Although it might sound simple, reproducing photographs and correcting flaws or damaged images is an art, and Victoria has a rare talent. Not only does she reproduce wonderful images, she also enables us to preserve them in a digital format should any damage occur to the original.

A special thank you goes to Victoria for donating photographs for door prizes at this year's Slim Lawrence Barbecue! She helped make this year's event a wonderful success.

Items Needed for the Museum of Jackson Hole

We are looking for old film footage of early Grand Teton National Park and social activities in Jackson Hole, as well as old barn wood to be used in exhibitions. Please call Robin at 733-9605 if you might be able to help.

Walking Tour Guides Tell the Stories of Jackson

Attending a Historical Society Walking Tour has been a popular activity for visitors and locals alike this past summer. This is the second year we offered free tours and began the tours in Jackson's highly-visible Town Square.

This summer, thirty-four regular tours were led by volunteers and staff. Linda Walker, Nancy Pettus, and Jesse O'Connor graciously gave their time to the cause—sharing stories about Jackson Hole's fascinating history. Education Assistant Becca Stephens regularly gave tours, and Collections Assistant Shannon Sullivan also gave one tour. Attendance averaged about sixteen people. The tours concluded at the historic Jackson Hole Museum, and many tour-goers went through the museum as well.

If you didn't make it this year, plan to attend a tour next year!



Becca Stephens with one of her walking tour groups in front of the American Legion Post 43.

Wister's West ~ continued from Page 1

cousin, Mary Charming Wister, known as Molly, from Boston. She was a gifted pianist, a handsome and determined woman with remarkable ability. Wister loved Saunderstown and spent 40 idyllic summers there on the shores of Narragansett Bay with his family of five children. Grant Lafarge, the son of the famous stained glass artist John Lafarge, was the architect for his house, which was completed in 1910. He was also the architect for part of New York City's magnificent cathedral, St. John the Divine, and for part of New York City's

subway system. Perhaps this is the reason seven of the 15 bedrooms in "Crowfield" lacked closets.

Life at "Crowfield" was full for the Wister children. Wister loved animals. There were cows to milk, chickens and horses to care for as well as lessons in music, French, and German. 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. The house was always full of music with Owen Wister generally playing the piano every evening.

A friend and wag, Leonard Bacon, wrote of the Philadelphian scene in Saunderstown:

Hey, diddle diddle
The Cope and the Biddle
To Saunderstown we go!
With Whartons and Bories
All in their glories
And Wisters all in a row. . .
Nothing is solidier
Than the Cadwalader
Nothing is brainier
Than Pennsylvanier
God reign on Rittenhouse Square!

continued on Page 4

Wister's West ~ continued from Page 3

Wister was a very bright child. At 10 he was sent to boarding school in Switzerland to be near his grandmother, Fanny Kemble, while his parents traveled. He became fluent in French and studied the Classics. After returning to the United States he was sent to St. Paul's School and graduated in 1878. While there, he wrote for *Horae Scholasticae* and served on its board of editors. He also wrote the music for an opera and asked Fanny Kemble to write the libretto, which she did. In 1879 he published his first piano composition at age 19.

From St. Paul's Wister went on to Harvard College where he met Theodore Roosevelt. In his sophomore year Wister wrote a musical for the Hasty Pudding Club called "Ivanhoe," based on the music of Offenbach. In it he made fun of his new friend and campus hero, Theodore Roosevelt, with this verse:

Awful tart
And awful smart,
With waxed mustache and hair in curls:

Brand new hat,
Likewise cravat,
To call upon the dear little girls.¹

The audience loved it, but Roosevelt thought the verse in poor taste. Despite his poetic mirth at the expense of Roosevelt, they became good friends when Wister joined Roosevelt as a member of the Porcellian Club.



Owen Wister (front left, seated) with the editorial board of *Horae Scholasticae* in 1877. Photograph used in Stokes' original article and courtesy of St. Paul's School.

1882 was a heady year for Wister. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa and *summa cum laude* in music from Harvard, published his first book, *The New Swiss Family Robinson*, (which received praise from Mark Twain), and played one of his compositions for Franz Liszt in Wagner's home in Bayreuth, Germany. His audience with Liszt had been arranged by Fanny Kemble. Liszt told Fanny that the boy had, "a pronounced talent." Wister was elated.

He had planned a career in classical music. However, his father discouraged him from pursuing music and persuaded him instead to go to Harvard Law School. He entered in 1885, graduated in 1888 accepting a position in a Philadelphia

law firm.

Prior to going to law school and after his European visit, Wister went to work at the Boston Union Safe Deposit Vault. He sat below stairs calculating interest at 2%. It was more than he could stand and it broke his health. Wister's doctor advised him to go West, and while still a lawyer he made 10 trips between 1885-1895, often for four months at a time. He traveled throughout Wyoming, California, Washington, Oregon, Texas, Arizona, and Colorado. But the Wyoming territory was his favorite. He made eight trips there.

The West was still wild, and Wyoming had not yet gained statehood. He kept detailed diaries of everything he saw, the people he met and recorded some conversations verbatim. These 15 diaries formed the basis of his Western stories and *The Virginian*. He said, "Upon every western expedition I had kept a full, faithful, realistic diary: details about pack horses, camps in the mountains, camps in the sage brush, nights in town, cards with cavalry officers. . . ." For example, on his first visit out West Wister wrote in his diary in July 1885, as he was leaving Medicine Bow, a description of the sunset.²

"We saw a sunset more remarkable than any yet. The mountains rose between us and the sun, but from behind the sun rose a saffron and gold vapor that seemed to be exhaled from some heavenly volcano.

All round the sky big patches of woolly clouds made a crimson stationary background, while over the face of this, long lines and fragments of slate-colored streamers sped like messengers."

As a major literary figure, Wister's life was intertwined with many well-known literary and artistic personalities. Among them were Henry James, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Rudyard Kipling, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edith Wharton, and Ernest Hemingway.

Of particular interest to me was Hemingway. Wister met Ernest Hemingway in Shell, Wyo., in 1928. They went fishing and shooting together and

became close friends. 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, unsolicited, a check for \$500. Shortly afterwards, Hemingway returned the check uncashed because his advance for *A Farewell To Arms* had come through.

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; he was an overseer for Harvard College for many years; and a Liberty ship was

named after him in World War II.

In total, Wister wrote 23 books and short stories. His unfinished novel, *Romney*, was expertly edited by Professor Jim Butler of La Salle University and was published two years ago. Wister had one other best selling novel, though less successful than *The Virginian*, called *Lady Baltimore*, which was a Victorian romance set in Charleston, S. C., and published in 1906. My grandfather used the proceeds to build his summer home Crowfield, which is now on the National Register of Historic Places and known as "Wister House."

Owen Wister started writing western short stories to save the sagebrush in literature before it disappeared. His own description of how it happened is in his book, *Roosevelt: The 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 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?"

"I am going to try it myself," Wister exclaimed to his friend.³ After that, Wister went upstairs at the Philadelphia Club to a small study and started writing his first short story, "Hank's Woman." Clearly, it seems to me Wister's motivation to write may not have been only his love of the West but his respect for Roosevelt who had been out West a few years earlier. He decided then to give up the law and become a writer. "Hank's Woman" was published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1892. Wister was thrilled with the publishing of his first short story, though most of his friends in Philadelphia paid little attention to it. However, Theodore Roosevelt was enthusiastic and encouraged him to write more western stories. Roosevelt's confidence in Wister's writing greatly strengthened their friendship. Wister wrote several other short stories later in the 1890s. Most were illustrated by Frederic Remington.

Wister used some material from his short Western stories to write *The Virginian* and added material to them including the heroine, Molly Wood—who was named after his wife. She was an easterner who traveled from New Hampshire to become the school marm in Bear Creek, Wyo. He published *The Virginian* in 1902, and it brought Wister great national acclaim. For example, in 1903 at a diplomatic reception at the White House with Theodore Roosevelt, Wister wrote to his mother that two

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Wister's West ~ continued from Page 4

women screamed when his name was announced. He also noted that no one fainted.

On the surface *The Virginian* would seem to be a simple love story about a humble hero, the Virginian, and a seemingly unattainable heroine, Molly Wood; and about a time in the majestic West that would soon pass. Molly was educated, wellborn, non-violent, tender, and sympathetic. The Virginian was daring, skilled, self-reliant, and chivalrous—a man who educated himself to woo his schoolteacher, Molly. He was a man of honor, few words, and a lively sense of humor.

The first edition was illustrated by A. J. Keller, and later editions used illustrations by Frederic Remington. The book was dedicated to his great friend, Theodore Roosevelt, with whom he shared the common bond of the West. They kept in touch and saw each other often.

Another time when they were together at a reception at the White House, Wister saw Alice (Longworth), Roosevelt's precociously wild young daughter by his first marriage, come into the reception with a snake wound around her arm. It was a garter snake named Emily after her stepmother's sister. Wister asked Roosevelt why he did not control Alice. The President responded with the famous line, "I can do one of two things. I can be President of the United States or I can control Alice. (Sister) I can't possibly do both."⁴

The Virginian was reprinted 15 times within seven months after initial publication, 50 times within the first 33 years, and many times since. Five movies have been made. The Virginian has been played by Gary Cooper, Joel McCrae, and recently, in a TV movie—Bill Pullman. *The Virginian* ran as a play on Broadway with Henry Fonda, and then regionally for over 30 years. It was also a long-running television series in the 1970s.

In the opening chapter the narrator observes the Virginian in the Medicine Bow Saloon playing poker with a man named Trampas, who ultimately we learn is the villain. The Virginian is winning. Trampas tries to hurry the Virginian to bet and says, "Your bet, you son of a " The Virginian then draws his gun and responds with what became the best known line in Western fiction, "When you call me that, smile."

Following this scene, when leaving Medicine Bow, Wister provides in the novel a beautiful passage of the sunset reflective of the grandeur of nature seen in his July 1885 diary notes: "The sun struck at hundreds of glittering points. And in a moment we were in the clean plains with the prairie dogs and the pale herds of antelope, the great, still air bathed us pure as water, strong as wine. The sunlight flooded the world."

Surely, *The Virginian* has done far

more for literature than save the memory of the sagebrush as Wister had planned. In *The New York Times* review of June 21, 1902, the reviewer recognized *The Virginian* would live on as a brilliant narrative and wrote:

"Owen Wister has come pretty near to writing the American novel. He has come as near to it as any man can well come. . . 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



During one of his many trips west as part of a hunting party in Wyoming in 1887 ~ Wister is shown here (upper right) pouring whiskey for an Indian guide named Tigee. 1958.2438.001

a remembrance . . . *The Virginian* in the 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."

There are four compelling themes in the book which, in my opinion, explain why it has endured.

1. A hero of extraordinary yet achievable standards. For example, the Virginian's integrity leads him to hang his cattle-rustling friend, Steve, under the code of the West; while his perseverance and chivalrous values enabled him to win Molly's heart.

2. Acceptance of the West by the tradition-bound East. Molly's final acquiescence to the Virginian comes "as an admission that the Old World East is ready to accept the democratic ideals of the new frontier."

3. Democracy, an equalizing influence in life. The narrator portrays true democracy and aristocracy to be the same, and that American independence gives every man the right to "find his own level" through his own abilities.

4. Faith in our country. Perhaps, the most compelling reason the book was so successful was expressed by Wister himself in the Rededication of the 1911 edition.

He wrote, the book is "an expression of American faith . . . with mistakes at times, but with wisdom in the main . . . we people will prove ourselves equal to the severest test—the test of Democracy."

These themes, combined with Wister's vivid descriptions of a majestic and poetic country, cast the West in a glowing light.

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 and well-crafted words, the bold individual spirit reminiscent of colonial times combined with the underlying themes of democracy and equality. 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. The western influence has played an ever-increasing role in our society, not only in literature but also in clothing and movies. Would Garth Brooks, John Denver, or Patsy Kline have found such a receptive audience without the patina of the Old West crafted by Wister in his novel? He was the first writer to romanticize the West. (Dolly Parton, of course, would have been popular, regardless.)

Even Rogers and Hammerstein with their musical, *Oklahoma*, and Irving Berlin with his musical, *Annie Get Your Gun*, could

not resist the West. And surely Ralph Lauren and the Marlboro man would be far less popular without the western mystique. These icons play against an existing cultural background which they, through their talent or appeal, enhance and pass on to the next generation. Men such as Buffalo Bill Cody and the dime novelist, Ned Butline, popularized the West for their generation. However, in my view, *The Virginian* set the stage and guidelines for the development of our western mystique which is continually being reinforced and championed today. It's important to note the western culture is only one of three in our country, which are truly indigenous. The other two are jazz and the American musical. Coincidentally, these also started in the early 20th century.

In summary, Owen Wister painted a picture with words that defined the West as he saw it. He gave it an aura and luster that remains with us today. 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. It is a great legacy.

¹ Darwin Payne, *Owen Wister Chronicler of the West, Gentleman of the East*. ² Owen Wister, *Roosevelt: The Story of a Friendship*. ³ Fanny Kemble Wister, *Owen Wister Out West*. ⁴ Edward J. Renahan, Jr., *The Lion's Pride*.



Thank you!

The Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum gratefully acknowledges the following businesses and individuals who made the 2009 Slim Lawrence Barbecue possible!



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A beautiful afternoon was enjoyed by guests at the Walton Ranch.



Christine Langdon, Vince Crofts, and Shelley and Kelly Rubrecht entertain at the Slim Lawrence Barbecue.



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