the TEXAS JACK SCOUT

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Giuseppina Morlacchi, Premier Danseuse

By Susan Omohundro

Giuseppina Morlacchi. [HTC]

A formal portrait of a youthful-appearing Giuseppina Morlacchi; date and photographer unknown. From the Harvard Theater Collection. (Barker:111)

Recent articles in the *Scout* by Rene and Larry Tyree made me curious to know more about Giuseppina Morlacchi's career as a dancer. I found Rene's article in the November *Scout* about the uncertain provenance of the scrapbook of clippings about her and Texas Jack fascinating. The authenticity of the scrapbook was analyzed by various authorities on the PBS program, History Detectives; most believe the scrapbook was created by someone close to the couple. Rene Tyree pursued the question of whether Giuseppina introduced the can-can dance to the United States, quoting an interview with Barbara Cohen-Stratyner, curator for exhibitions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

The *Scout* has never explored Giuseppina Morlacchi's career and contributions to dance in any great detail. I think it's time to do so.

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from the Editor's Desk...

This July 2009 issue of *The Texas Jack Scout* has a dual theme. First and foremost, we have Susan Omohundro's wonderful article about Josephine Morlacchi. As Texas Jack's wife, Josephine had a major part in the decision to leave the east coast. The couple spent time in theaters from St. Louis to Denver, ending in Leadville to take up the stage with the support of Josephine's ballet troupe. As we prepare to visit Leadville in July 2010, this article helps us to know more about that portion of history in Jack and Josephine's life.

The secondary theme is centered around the Story Paper reprint. A Story Paper is basically a story placed in a type of magazine of the time. This particular reprint is from 1951, but shows the flavor of Texas Jack and Wild Bill Hickok's fame still in the middle of the 20th century. It also shows several anachronisms. I will not spoil it for you but let you figure them out on your own. Suffice it to say, it is definitely a work of fiction. So take the "facts" about Texas Jack with a huge lump of salt.

Both of these themes will lead toward our next Roundup in Golden, Colorado, in July 2010. As mentioned, we will spend a day in Leadville during our time together. But also I intend to have some reprints ready of a Dime Novel at that time. So, this issue of the *Scout* is well matched in basic structure for our future dealings in Colorado. It has been a lot of fun putting it together. Enjoy!

Larry Tyree

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The Texas Jack Association was founded in 1980 by Frank Sullivan to commemorate John Baker Omohundro, prairie scout, western hunting guide, and Wild West showman.

The Texas Jack Scout publishes articles about John B. "Texas Jack" Omohundro, the times and places in which he lived, and individuals who have contributed substantially to maintaining his memory.

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Herschel Logan (*Buckskin and Satin*, 1954) treats Morlacchi's work as tangential to the career of his idol, Texas Jack (he doesn't even spell her name correctly). The only published volume to discuss her life and work in detail was written by Barbara M. Barker and was a product of her doctoral research at New York University. Titled *Ballet or Ballyhoo: the American Careers of Maria Bonfanti, Rita Sangalli and Giuseppina Morlacchi*, it was published by Dance Horizons, Brooklyn, NY, in 1984. It will be my chief reference.

. . .

Giuseppina Morlacchi was born near Milan, Italy, on October 8, 1836. At the age of six she entered the ballet school attached to La Scala, and did well. She made her debut in Genoa when she was 19, in "Faust." She impressed the director of Her Majesty's Theatre in London and was invited to join their ballet corps. She subsequently toured the continent for several years.

In 1867, Don Juan De Pol, a noted Spanish artist and manager, persuaded her to come to America as the leading dancer in "The Devil's Auction," which Barker describes as a "spectacular melodrama." It opened in New York on October 3. However, "the production was beset with problems, technical, managerial, and financial." (p. 113). The only redeeming features, according to the critics, were the dancers and the dances. Morlacchi drew special praise for her artistry and light movements. She was considered shy and self-effacing. She had substantial roles in all three acts – a romantic solo in the first act; she was part of the "Grand March, Indian Guards, Amazons and Warriors preceding the Queen of El Dorado, her Ministers and the Court" in the second act; and the "Bee Dance" in the third. The "Bee Dance" was a solo designed to show her impeccable technique and brilliant pirouettes.

De Pol did not treat his dancers well and underpaid them. Even his biggest star, Morlacchi, had to travel across the Atlantic in a second-class cabin, a trip that made her too unwell to perform for the first weeks. De Pol had trouble keeping dancers. Morlacchi stayed with him longer than most – 6 months.

The show lost money in New York, even after moving to a cheaper theater, and closed in December. De Pol and a reduced cast, including Morlacchi, began a five-month tour, opening in Boston at Christmas.

Morlacchi was 31 when she arrived in Boston. She'd been leading a peripatetic life up to that point. She liked Boston very much and began to look for property (we will return to this subject). Bostonians liked Giuseppina, too. In 1867 Boston had nine theaters and relatively sophisticated though conservative audiences, compared to New York. "The Devil's Auction" playbill from Boston lists Morlacchi dancing several numbers – the "Bee Dance," a "Pas de Deux," the "Carnival of Venice," and concluding with a company performance of "The Can Can."

What was this can-can like? I think we can say that it was a legitimate rather than titillating dance. While in Boston, Morlacchi choreographed a can-can of her own. The name "can-can" calls to mind a group of women kicking as high as possible and flouncing ruffled dresses in a performance that was rather risqué by Victorian standards. However, Morlacchi's dance was more balletic and danced on pointe, and featured three pairs of dancers against a background of corps de ballet. The dance she composed became a staple in her repertory.

Morlacchi left De Pol in April of 1868. She moved to the company of J. M. McDonough in Louisville, performing the lead dances in "The Black Crook." "The Black Crook" was a melodramatic variety show similar to "The Devil's Auction" and had been performed, with variations, for decades. McDonough's management was no improvement over De Pol's, and she soon left his company to found her own.

"Touring taught Morlacchi a great deal. She observed De Pol's and McDonough's management and the rapid turnover in the cast, and developed an understanding of the

financial problems besetting managers. Gradually, she assumed the role of spokesman for the dancers, often defending them against managerial injustice. . . "(p. 126).

Morlacchi was greatly aided in establishing an independent career by Thomas M. Burke, a man she met in McDonough's company. Burke began as a character actor, and also wrote for newspapers. His greatest gift, however, was publicity, and he is considered one of the first press agents. Burke went on later to work for Josephine and her husband's "Combination" until Texas Jack died. Burke subsequently worked for Buffalo Bill's Wild West show for many years and made a significant contribution to its success.

During her brief stay with McDonough, Morlacchi designed several dances, which she used in her program when she started her own troupe in Boston at the Theatre Comique. The program was a variety show, or, in Barker's words, a miscellaneous "hodgepodge."

A formal portrait of Giuseppina Morlacchi taken in 1869. "When the medal Morlacchi is wearing was presented on stage at the Boston Theatre at the end of her benefit evening, January 6, 1869, she was too overcome to speak." From the University of Texas at Austin collection (Barker:128)

Morlacchi and her company also performed in April of 1869 in New York in Shakespeare's "The Tempest." The production featured complicated sets and scenery and special effects and marked the opening of James Fisk's Grand Opera House. Morlacchi's 32-member company, representing Prospero attended by his sprites, performed a can-can, probably the one she had composed the previous year in Boston. A review in *The Sun* said, "The whole action of the play stopped, the current of thought and attention broken suddenly off and the audience is treated to a half-an-hour of dancing to Offenbach's music

that has not the slightest reference to the play and gives no illustration to it; which indeed, though good in itself, is simply a gross folly and impertinence thrust into the middle of Shakespeare's work." (Barker:132-33). The second ballet, in Act IV, featuring Iris, Ceres, Juno and other goddesses, was more appropriate and more successful. The dancing was considered better than the acting.

After "The Tempest" Fisk produced "Patrie" which again featured Morlacchi and her dancers. However it lost money and soon closed. According to Barker, Fisk liked and respected Morlacchi and treated her well.

Unlike many performers, Morlacchi handled her money carefully. She had been saving her money for the past two years and by 1870 had $6,000 to put toward purchase of a 40-acre farm in Billerica (taking on a $1700 mortgage). Barker doesn't know why Morlacchi was attracted to Billerica – it wasn't Italian, and it was too far from Boston for a daily commute. On the plus side, the farm could be managed by her sister Angelina and it provided a home for their father. The large farmhouse had extra rooms for her dancers and guests. And she did seemingly enjoy country life, finding it a refuge from the pressure of her professional life and constant travel. She enjoyed horseback riding and was even willing to work in the vegetable garden.

"One wonders what the summer folk and Yankee farmers thought of a bevy of exotic foreign dancing girls invading their quiet town each summer. Morlacchi and her entourage apparently did not retire completely from public view. A skillful and daring horsewoman, Morlacchi would frequently take her guests on rides through the woodlands and in full-spirited races along country roads. Occasionally, the dancer and her sister would dress as dandies in waistcoats, top hats, and tails and take a carriage ride through town." (p. 135).

I note that horseback riding was one activity both she and her future husband, Texas Jack, enjoyed and executed skillfully.

By 1870, Morlacchi had established a pattern she maintained throughout her career. She toured as a guest or with her own "combination" from fall to early summer, then spent the summer at her home in Billerica. Unlike Bonfanti and Sangalli (the other two women of the time who introduced ballet to America) she avoided New York City, preferring Boston, where she had more control and opportunity to choreograph, but sometimes "found herself in inferior productions which depended for their success on her ability to draw an audience." (p. 139).

Barker makes it clear that the life of a ballerina in this era was, most of the time, far from glamorous and required hard work and tenacity. There was no job security. Shows varied in their longevity and success, the repertoire of dances changed frequently, and a great deal of arduous travel was required. Also, accidents and falls were not infrequent.

In addition to buying a home in Massachusetts, Morlacchi traveled the breadth of the country as far as California in 1870. She had seven completely different programs, all of which featured her own choreography. One of them was "The French Spy." In "The French Spy" she played three roles: a young French woman, a young soldier, and a "Wild Arab Boy." The story was told by using balletic mime as taught at La Scala. Each act included several dances, all featuring Morlacchi.

Morlacchi in military costume for "The French Spy" in 1870. Dressing in male costume was a trait that tended to tarnish the reputation of dancers. The tutu was bad enough, revealing as it did the female form. From the Museum of Modern Art dance collection (Barker:141).

Whether due in part to her costumes or not, Morlacchi was very popular in California in 1870 and earned $30,000 in gold. Then she moved on to Virginia City. The critics: "We unhesitatingly say that her equal never appeared in this city, and we doubt very much whether at present she has an equal in the country." (Barker:143). They liked her better than Bonfanti or Sangalli, both her dancing and her mime. Then she moved back east, performing "The French Spy" at Boston Museum Theater and then at Boston Theatre.

After "The French Spy" closed Morlacchi remained at Boston Theatre in "The Wizard Skiff." Again she played three roles, one of them male. With her were the Majiltons, a family team of acrobatic dancers. Morlacchi's company toured from December 1871 to December 1872, in eastern and midwestern cities, alternating "Masaniello" and "The French Spy."

. . .

In late 1872 Morlacchi and company were playing in Nixon's Opera House in Chicago. The supporting cast was very poor quality; the show did poorly and went broke. When James Nixon came up with the money to settle the

dancers' board bills and send them back to Boston on the train, Morlacchi stayed in Chicago, having been asked to join Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack in "The Scouts of the Prairie."

Why did she accept the offer? I wonder about the balance of financial considerations against the desire to try something new. Barker does not elucidate. Certainly, "The Scouts of the Prairie" was a departure from her usual fare, and a gamble. Perhaps she was already attracted to Texas Jack and willing to take a chance on the show.

Ned Buntline, the author of the show, wanted Morlacchi for the part of Dove Eye, the Indian maiden in distress. She had four solo dances and was enlisted to help the scouts learn their lines (which, as we all know, they didn't do very well).

"The Scouts of the Prairie" opened December 16, 1872, at Nixon's Theater, just days after Morlacchi's show there closed.

Dove Eye was Morlacchi's first speaking role. "Dressed in buckskin and a feathered headdress, with her face powdered reddish-brown, she was almost unrecognizable. Morlacchi's accent complicated matters." (p. 156). But the critics were fairly kind to her, reserving their scorn for the male actors.

Morlacchi in 1873 as Dove Eye in "Scouts of the Prairie." From the University of Texas at Austin collection (Barker:155)

The show was very successful and toured for six months, until June 16, 1873. During this time, Morlacchi and Texas Jack spent a great deal of time together, playing love scenes on stage and enjoying suppers after the theatre. But when summer came, Jack returned to the West and Morlacchi resumed tours with her own dancers. In a surprise move, on August 31, 1873, a week before the company reassembled for the new theatrical season, Morlacchi and Jack were married at Saint Mary's Catholic Church in Rochester, New York. It was a small private ceremony. I don't know whether the couple had reached an understanding before parting for the summer, but it seems likely.

As *The New York Times* of September 3, 1873 quoted from the Rochester *Express*, "'Texas Jack's' appearance is well known to most people. He is a fine specimen of physical manhood. His exploits are too well known to mention here. The lady's appearance is also well known. She is a native of Italy, a brunette, graceful, and said to be highly educated. She has not what might be called a beautiful face, but she is interesting. She has ranked for some time as one of the best interpreters of Terpsichorean art on the American stage. . ." (*Texas Jack Scou*t:Nov.2008:9).

It's pretty clear whom the Rochester reporter considered the more important partner! As to Giuseppina Morlacchi's appearance, most reports of the day considered her less than beautiful. She was a little too petite and slender for the tastes of the 1870s. Her expressive eyes were thought to be her best feature. She was also considered to be a bit shy and self-effacing. However, fans (and critics) found her personality charming and her movement light and graceful.

Barker notes that "The match between Morlacchi and the Texas Scout was an unlikely one." (p. 157). Their backgrounds differed enormously. "Jack loved the West, with its openness and simplicity. Morlacchi preferred quiet, conservative Boston. Unlike Jack, who was never comfortable remaining in one place for a long time, Morlacchi had set down roots. She treasured her peaceful retreat on the farm and the closeness of her family. She was older by ten years (although she admitted to only three), practical, and capable. Jack was a reckless dreamer who followed his fancy. He always felt more at home on the prairie, and struck an uneasy balance between winter tours with Morlacchi and summers spent ranching and acting as a guide. Morlacchi never accompanied him on these trips . . . "(p. 157)

Her marriage was hard on Tom Burke, who'd been her suitor for years. "Following her retirement [in 1880, after her husband's death], he frequently visited her and was the only friend from her theatrical days to attend her funeral." (p. 158)

The second Wild West show, "Scouts of the Plains," opened September 8, 1873, in Williamsburg, Pennsylvania, the day after Morlacchi's ballet company closed in Buffalo. So again she had no rehearsal time. But the show was stronger than that of the previous year. It had the services of Tom Burke as publicist and Wild Bill as actor. Morlacchi played Pale Dove and had several new dances and also sang.

"The ballerina's ability to shift from one theatrical form to another is a testimony to her versatility and discipline. Throughout the years in which one-night stands in Western drama alternated with principal roles in ballet companies, Morlacchi's technique remained flawless. Maintaining technique is difficult even when touring with a company of dancers whose daily rehearsals and classes involve the entire company. Morlacchi, however, was usually the only dancer in the Western shows. Furthermore, her dances were all solos. In order to stay in shape, she must have worked by herself for about two hours a day, a feat which, in light of her touring schedule, is remarkable." (p. 159).

As in the previous year, the show toured for about six months before closing. In March 1875 Morlacchi appeared in "Ahmed," an elaborate fantasy based on a Washington

Irving story. After that closed she produced her own version of Auber's opera, "La Bayadere." She had solos in each act. It was a critical but not commercial success and closed after two weeks**.** Meanwhile, Jack spent the summer of 1875 exploring the West with the Earl of Dunraven**.**

1875-76 was the last season for Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack, and Giuseppina Morlacchi to appear together. This year they did "Life on the Border." "It has a tongue-in-cheek quality applied to a mixture of fact and melodrama. There is a great deal of heroic posturing and good-natured comedy surrounding one-dimensional characters. Morlacchi, who played everything in her career from an East Indian princess in 'La Bayadere' to an Indian friend to the Scouts, was cast in her most unlikely role, Betty Mullany, an Irish girl from County Cork. It is difficult to imagine the ballerina overcoming her Italian accent. . . "(p. 161).

In 1877 she and Jack bought a home in Lowell, Massachusetts, called Suffock Hall. It was a business investment, with store space at street level and apartments on the upper levels. They paid $22,000 for it, an indication that they were doing well.

In 1877 Jack formed his own combination, with her assistance. They put on three new plays, structured as before. His acting gradually improved (or at any rate, his wife claimed it did).

In 1878 and 1879 Jack and Giuseppina toured together at times and separately at others.

A less-often seen portrait of Texas Jack, c. 1880, taken in the last year of his life. From http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Texas_Jack_Cabinet_Card.jpg

The spring of 1880 brought the couple to Leadville, arriving separately. Jack opened with "The Trapper's Daughter." Giuseppina arrived in April and opened "The French Spy" at Tabor's Opera House while he was doing "Humpty Dumpty" at the Grand Central. Meanwhile she was preparing a production of "The Black Crook." Supposedly, "The Black Crook" drew the largest audiences of any production in the history of Leadville (Barker:166).

At the end of the run a horseback parade was held in chilly weather; Jack caught cold, which turned into pneumonia. Giuseppina

stayed by his side, nursing him, to no avail. Commentators all agree that she was prostrate with grief when he died.

After her husband's death, Morlacchi disbanded her company and announced her retirement. She was 43. She returned to Lowell to live with her sister Angelina. After retirement she occasionally taught dancing to mill girls in Lowell but did not establish a school.

In August 1885 Angelina died. Giuseppina died on July 23, 1886 after suffering from stomach cancer for nine months. She spent her last days back in her Billerica home, cared for by a couple with whom she had worked at the Boston Theatre. She left the bulk of her estate to the Actor's Fund, a charity.

Barker summarizes Morlacchi's career thus: "Throughout her thirteen-year career in this country, she slipped from European ballet to Western drama and back again without ever losing her impeccable technique. This, added to her ability as a mime and to her charisma as a performer, won her the admiration and respect of the American public. Her efforts on behalf of dancers and her devotion to the underprivileged after retirement made her an asset in both the theatrical community and the community at large." (p. 234)

. . .

How does Morlacchi fit in the world of ballet and the culture of her era? It is instructive to compare her career to that of the other two leading ballerinas of the day, Rita Sangalli and Maria Bonfanti. There are numerous similarities as well as a few differences.

Left-Rita Sangalli, date and role unknown. From the Harvard Theater Collection (Barker:39)
Right-Maria Bonfanti, role and date unknown (but note the similarity to the pose of Rita Sangalli). From the Bonfanti Dance Collection (Barker:170)

At the height of her career, Rita Sangalli (1849-1909) held the most prestigious position in Europe, at the Paris Opera. She was big and strong and had a strong will. She made an early debut. "In the spring of 1866, Sangalli was engaged as a principal dancer at her Majesty's Theatre, London, as a replacement for Giuseppina Morlacchi. The transition from the disciplined, efficient atmosphere of La Scala, where ballet was lavishly produced and highly prized, to the theatre of London was very great." (p. 40)

In 1866 Sangalli and Maria Bonfanti came together to New York to open "The Black Crook." They traveled by ship, accompanied by their mothers. (Sangalli was only 17, Bonfanti 19.) They stayed at a boarding house next to Niblo's theater. They were paid well, at $140 per week. "The Black Crook" was wildly successful, due to its dance, in spite of a ridiculous plot and stilted dialogue.

A rivalry developed between the two dancers, encouraged by management. Sangalli left when her contract was up to tour on her own. Bonfanti stayed with "The Black Crook".

Sangalli was in Boston in "Midsummer Night's Dream" in 1867 when Morlacchi arrived to play in "Devil's Auction." Both were managed by B. F. Whitman. Was there an implicit competition? Morlacchi usually avoided direct competition.

Sangalli returned to New York City in March 1868 in "Humpty Dumpty," at $180 a week, at the Olympic Theatre. "Humpty Dumpty" featured George Fox, a pantomimist. It ran successfully for 62 weeks. The ballet was incidental to the story, but Sangalli had an influence on the choreography and choice of dances. When "White Fawn" closed, some of its dancers joined "Humpty Dumpty," to its betterment. "Humpty Dumpty" was a "personal triumph" for Sangalli (p. 81)

"Hiccory Diccory Dock" followed with the same performers, but it was not as successful. Sangalli then worked for James Fisk, the flamboyant capitalist, who had acquired several theatres. "Bonfanti, Sangalli, and Morlacchi all worked for him, frequently more than one of them at a time . . ." (p. 87). Fisk loved display and lavish productions. Sangalli was in "The Huguenots" opera at his Grand Opera House. This was not long after Morlacchi performed in "The Tempest" at the Grand Opera's opening.

Like Morlacchi, Sangalli went on to start her own company. She put on "Flik e Flok" at Wood's Museum and Menagerie. The dancing was good, the drama and dialogue not. As the name suggests, Wood's was not a high-class venue. Her production moved to Washington, DC, and failed. She then accepted an invitation from Tom Maguire in California for his Opera House in San Francisco, as did Bonfanti. Maguire put on "The Black Crook" and "Robinson Crusoe." He wasn't making a profit, though, so he planned to put both ballerinas on the same bill. However, Bonfanti walked out and went to California Theater. Sangalli's "Can Can" was not enough to make Maguire's Opera House succeed. After her show in San Francisco folded, Sangalli went on tour, then returned to Europe to a long and successful career.

Barker offers no explanation of why Sangalli left America after four years and never returned; but it seems she had more success, respect, and stability at home. She also married well. It's clear that her career in the United States was arduous, competitive, and rather precarious.

The other Italian ballerina influential in the United States was Maria Bonfanti (1845-1921). Barker sums her thus: "….for all her spirituality, Bonfanti was a survivor. She lasted twenty-five years as a performer in the American theatre. Although audiences placed a premium on variety, Bonfanti was invariable. Year after year, tour after tour, the ballerina

performed largely the same repertory and was praised for consistently high artistic standards." (p. 171).

Like Morlacchi and Sangalli, Bonfanti trained at La Scala under Carlo Blasis, the man responsible for establishing the convention of constant, repetitive training of ballet dancers. After her debut, she went to Covent Garden in London, then to Spain, then to "The Black Crook" in New York as the top-ranked ballerina. "Her qualities as a dancer were particularly well suited to the needs of American spectacle. Unlike Morlacchi and Sangalli, Bonfanti was pretty in the accepted convention of the day." (p. 173).

"The Black Crook" became Bonfanti's "bread and butter," in Barker's words. She appeared in at least fourteen different productions, in countless performances. After the 1867 production of "The Black Crook" finished, Bonfanti performed in "White Fawn,"in 1868, using Offenbach's music for the ballet.

When Bonfanti's mother became ill and returned to Italy, her sister Olimpia assumed the role of companion and assistant, for the rest of her life. (Note the similarity to Morlacchi's dependence on her sister, Angelina.)

In June of 1868 Bonfanti was in Chicago. Her performances were considered lackluster until Morlacchi came to town to open "The Black Crook." Then she caught fire.

Keeping up the performers' peripatetic tradition, Bonfanti went back to New York, then made a tour of upstate New York, then made a visit to Italy. She began a practice of visiting Italy two months a year to visit her family and study with her old teachers.

In 1872 Bonfanti's life took a dramatic turn when she met George Curtiss Hoffman, then 19 (she was 27). They married in Paris after a whirlwind courtship. George's wealthy parents cut him off, disapproving of his liaison and not knowing he had married Maria. As a result, the newlyweds had no money to live on after she became pregnant and couldn't work. Their daughter Sophie was born in 1873. The baby was cared for by Olimpia while Maria went back to work in the US. When Maria performed in New York, George lived with her, but when she toured, she toured alone.

George became ill and died of consumption in 1876. The marriage was finally revealed to and acknowledged by his parents. Bonfanti collapsed after her husband died. His parents took her in for several months and an attachment formed. She agreed that they could take over care of Sophie at age 5, but she chose to resume her career.

She and her mother-in-law were active in the Sorosis Club, an early feminist organization that discussed important issues of the day. Bonfanti lived with Dr. Caroline Soule, president of the club, when she resumed her career in "Life" dancing the "Snow Ballet." Her career had suffered a setback by her lengthy absence and the negative publicity about her marriage, and she was earning less. But she kept touring, maintaining a grueling schedule, usually making about $100 a week.

Throughout her career, Bonfanti was consistent in her demands for top billing. In "Around the World in Eighty Days", in 1878, she walked out when not given top billing and faced with competition from long-time rival Josephine De Rosa, a much more athletic dancer. It must have been hard to give up the work.

Her career took a turn for the better when the Metropolitan Opera opened in 1883, with Bonfanti as the prima ballerina. But she grew unhappy because the level of performance at the Met was discouragingly low and audiences were not particularly knowledgeable. She finally retired in 1890 and went to Europe. In 1897 she returned to New York City to open a dance school, which she operated on fairly strict, traditional standards. She lived quietly in her later years, valuing her privacy, and lived to the age of 76.

The three ballerinas differed in appearance and style. Barker again: "On stage, Morlacchi had a luminous quality that grew out of an easy command of technique and an inner serenity and strength. Maria Bonfanti had

softer features . . . Her demeanor both on and off the stage was always one of ladylike composure. . .The youngest and most typical of the dancers produced at La Scala in the late nineteenth century was Rita Sangalli. Her powerful legs and muscular body were trained for feats of great strength and endurance. She was an acrobatic rather than a spiritual dancer, and possessed neither Morlacchi's expressiveness nor Bonfanti's reserve. Sangalli had a will of iron that made itself felt on and off the stage." (p. 12)

What, then, did the three Italian ballerinas have in common? They all studied at La Scala, under the direction of Carlo Blasis. They were well-brought-up middle-class girls, devout Catholics. At La Scala, they led extremely sheltered lives, rarely going anywhere without a chaperon.

But unlike most of their peers, these three were independent, adventurous, ambitious, and fascinated by America. They faced several obstacles, however.

America offered no secure employment in state-supported theaters and provided no native supply of dancers for the corps de ballet. The poor quality of the supporting players was a recurrent headache for all three women. Managers were sometimes exploitative – dancers usually had to supply their own costumes and shoes, couldn't choose their roles, and had to spend long weeks on tour.

Also, the ballerinas gave up a certain degree of social and artistic respectability. This must have been galling to them. To quote Reverend Junius Henry Brown's 1868 remarks: "The ballet is deceitful, tempting, seductive . . . The duty of the day is to reach men through their senses; to stir their blood with material agencies, as the Maria Bonfantis and Sohlkes, and Morlacchis do. Charming exemplars they for American ladies – for the pure daughters of a proud country." (Barker: 18) He was implying that ballet girls (and even the highest ballerinas were referred to as "ballet *girls*") were prostitutes. And in fact some part-time dancers in the corps de ballet were also prostitutes.

Thus, the fuss about the can-can: Were the performers too scantily clad? Moving too suggestively? Was the can-can ballet or was it burlesque? And who was responsible? It seems in Morlacchi's choreography the can-can was ballet. At the same time, however, she often appeared on stage dressed in male garb, which would have shocked or at least titillated most members of a 19th century audience, so we know she wasn't too "prissy" to do what her career demanded.

Knowing how Americans felt about theater performers, all three ballerinas took pains to protect their moral reputations, traveling with mothers and/or sisters. Bonfanti's scandalous alliance with George Hoffman surely did not help the reputations of any of them. As it happens, Bonfanti and Morlacchi married at about the same time. The difference was that Morlacchi married a fellow performer, not a wealthy heir. Her marriage did not hurt her career, and may have helped it.

In her day, Giuseppina Morlacchi was widely admired, loved, and respected. She was hardworking, courageous, and intrepid. She was generous. She was talented. She had a pleasing personality and demeanor. All of this emerges from the facts of her life and the comments of contemporary observers.

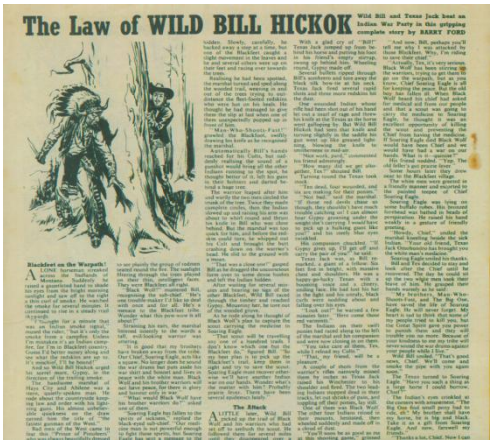
Yet Morlacchi's reputation by 1984 was so faded that Barbara Barker found it difficult to research her career, though she says she found her an "inspiration" (p. x). Does this remind us of the ultimate fate of Texas Jack? Jack and Giuseppina found brief fame; long obscurity. The Texas Jack Association should strive to keep Texas Jack *and* his wife known.

A photograph of John B. Omohundro more or less playing himself ("Texas Jack, Scout") and Giuseppina Morlacchi playing an Indian maiden, "Dove Eye," in the first Wild West show, "Scouts of the Prairie," in 1873, a few months before their marriage. The photograph shows her regarding him with affection. In this case, life imitated art. From the collection of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.
http://www.bbhc.org/bbm/biographyTJ.cfm

COMIC REPRINT

The following reprint of a comic book story from February 1951 is an example of the type of comic book style publication that became very popular in the 19th century, and which continued on into the 20th century as well. Many thanks to Richard Hurt for providing the copy. (Larry Tyree)

Because the actual size and the types of columns were too hard to reproduce on 8.5 x 11 paper, the text was retyped in entirety, including the British spelling which is noted due to its provenance in England. Here is a small reprint of what the original version looked like:


The Law of WILD BILL HICKOK

Wild Bill and Texas Jack beat an Indian War Party in this gripping complete story by BARRY FORD

The Law of WILD BILL HICKOK

Wild Bill and Texas Jack beat an Indian War Party in this gripping complete story
By Barry Ford

Blackfeet on the Warpath!

A lone horseman streaked across the badlands of Montana. Suddenly he raised a gauntleted hand to shade his eyes from the bright morning sunlight and saw off to the right a thin curl of smoke. He watched the smoke for several minutes. It continued to rise in a steady trail skywards.

"I thought for a minute that was an Indian smoke signal," mused the rider, "but it's only the smoke from a campfire. Unless I'm mistaken it's an Indian campfire, for I'm in Blackfeet country. Guess I'd better mosey along and see what the redskins are up to. It's a mischief, I'll be bound!"

And so Wild Bill Hickok urged his sorrel mare, Gypsy, in the direction of the trailing smoke.

The handsome marshal of Hays City and Abilene was a stern, quietly-spoken man. He rode about the countryside keeping law and order with his lightning guns. His almost unbelievable quickness on the draw earned him the title of the "fastest gunman of the West".

Bad men of the West came to fear this "Prince of Pistoleers" who was always beautifully dressed in a red velvet jacket and white silk shirt, with white broadcloth pants tucked into shining thigh-length cavalry boots decorated with a pair of large golden spurs. His slim waist was encircled by a wide, heavily

embossed gunbelt with an enormous silver buckle. His famous silver-butted Colts nestled in their greased cutaway holsters suspended from his belt. Tall, broad-shouldered and muscular, with a neatly trimmed chin-beard and moustache he was a magnificent figure of a man. This border cavalier rode carelessly well with his wide-brimmed sombrero with its golden cord.

Wild Bill left the open country and came to some dense timber land. There he dismounted, hid Gypsy amongst some thick shrubs and crept towards the campfire which he could see through the trees. Frontiersman that he was, he stalked along with the silent tread of an Indian, taking light, gliding steps and moving with the utmost caution so as not so stir the leaves. He drew near enough to see plainly the group of redmen seated rough the fire. The sunlight filtering through the trees played on their thin, intelligent faces. They were Blackfeet all right.

"Black Wolf!" muttered Bill, recognizing the sub-chief. "He's one trouble-maker I'd like to deal with once and for all. He's a menace to the Blackfeet tribe. Wonder what this pow-wow is all about?" Straining his ears, the marshal listened intently to the words a tall, evil-looking warrior was uttering. "It is good that my brothers have broken away from the tribe. Our Chief, Soaring Eagle, acts like a squaw. No longer does he sound the war drums but puts aside his war shirt and bonnet and lives in peace with the white man. Black Wolf and his brother warriors will not have peace, for there is glory and honour only in war."

"What would Black Wolf have his brother warriors do?" asked one of them.

"Soaring Eagle has fallen to the spirits of sickness," replied the black-eyed sub-chief. "Our medicine man is not powerful enough to fight those spirits, but Soaring Eagles has sent a message to the palefaces. A paleface scout is now on his way to the lodge of Soaring Eagle with white man's medicine. If the medicine does not reach our Chief, then he dies." A cunning expression crossed his crafty face. "Black Wolf says this medicine must not reach Soaring Eagle!"

"It is good, we will kill the scout," the Blackfeet murmured. "When the spirits of sickness have taken Soaring Eagle, I, Black Wolf, shall be your Chieftain. I shall force the palefaces to go on the warpath and once more the happy sound of war drums will echo in our village." A loud cheer broke out amongst the young warriors.

"I'd like to hog-tie that no-good redskin," Wild Bill thought indignantly. "So he wants to start a war does he—well, we'll just see about that!" Unfortunately at that moment, as the cheering died down, the marshal accidentally stepped on a dry twig which snapped in two. The sharp ears of the Indians caught the sound of that snapping twig and their keen eyes pierced the leafy shrubs where Bill was hidden. Slowly, carefully, he backed away a step at a time, but one of the Blackfeet caught a slight movement in the leaves and he and several others were up on their feet and racing over towards the trees.

Realising he had been spotted, the marshal turned and sped along the wooded trail, weaving in and out of the trees trying to outdistance the fleet-footed redskins who were hot on his heels. He thought he had managed to give them the slip at last when one of them unexpectedly popped up in front of him.

"Man-Who-Shoots-Fast!" growled the Blackfoot, swiftly drawing his knife as he

recognized the marshal. Automatically Bill's hands reached for his Colts, but suddenly realizing the sound of a gunshot would bring all the other Indians running to the spot, he thought better of it, left his guns in their holsters and darted behind a huge tree.

The warrior leaped after him and warily the two men circled the trunk of the tree. Twice they made complete circles, then the Indian slowed up and raising his arm was about to whirl round and thrust his knife in Bill who was close behind. But the marshal was too quick for him, and before the redskin could turn, he whipped out his Colt and brought the butt crashing down on the warrior's head. He slid to the ground with a moan.

"That was a close one!" gasped Bill as he dragged the unconscious form over to some dense bushes and left the Indian hidden. After waiting for several minutes and hearing no sign of the other Blackfeet, Wild Bill raced through the timber and reached Gypsy. Mounting her, he tore out of the wooded grove. As he rode along he thought of Black Wolf's plan to capture the scout carrying the medicine to Soaring Eagle.

"That scout will be travelling any one of a hundred trails. I don't know which one but the Blackfeet do," figured Bill. "So my best plan is to pick up the Blackfeet's trail, keep them in sight and try to save the scout. Soaring Eagle must recover otherwise we'll have another Indian war on our hands. Wonder what's the matter with him? Probably prairie fever. There have been several epidemics lately."

The Attack

A little later, Wild Bill picked up the trail of Black Wolf and his warriors who had set off to ambush the scout. He followed them for several miles until they disappeared over a hilltop.

As he came cautiously to the crest of a hill there came the sound of gunshots and he reined in sharply. Below him were about twenty dismounted Blackfeet surrounding a rider. Even as Bill watched, the man's horse was shot from under him. Its rider rolled clear, grabbed his Winchester from the saddle-boot and taking cover behind his dead mount, began blazing away as the redmen's bullets spattered all round him.

"By glory, it's Tex!" exclaimed the marshal in surprise, and digging his spurs into Gypsy he galloped furiously down the hill. Guiding his mare by the firm pressure of his knees he whipped out both Colts and fired rapidly into the midst of the Indians taking them by surprise and killing four of them. Still firing, he raced over towards his friend, Texas Jack Omohundro.

"Climb aboard", yelled Bill slipping his left boot out of the stirrup and slowing down. He fired back and another Indian crashed to the ground. With a glad cry of "Bill!" Texas Jack jumped up from behind his horse and putting his foot in his friend's empty stirrup, swung up behind him. Wheeling round, Gypsy made off.

Several bullets ripped through Bill's sombrero and tore away the black silk bow-tie at his neck. Texas Jack fired several rapid shots and three more redskins hit the dust. One wounded Indian whose rifle had been shot out of his hand let out a snarl of rage and threw his knife at the Texas as the horse went galloping by. But Wild Bill Hickok had seen that knife and turning slightly in the saddle his gun went up like greased lightning, blowing the knife to

smithereens in mid-air. "Nice work, pard," commented his friend admiringly. "How many did we get altogether, Tex?" shouted Bill. Turning round the Texan took stock.

"Ten dead, four wounded, and six are making for their ponies." "Not bad," said the marshal. "If those red devils chase us though, they shouldn't have much trouble catching us! I can almost hear Gypsy groaning under the weight she's carrying. I would have to pick up a hulking giant like you!" And his steely blue eyes twinkled. His companion chuckled. "If Gypsy gives up, I'll get off and carry the pair of you!" he said.

Texas Jack was, as Bill remarked, a giant of a fellow. Six feet five in height, with massive chest and shoulders. He was a happy-go-lucky Texan with a booming voice and a cheery smiling face. He has lost his hat in the fight and his unruly, black curls were nodding about and falling over his eyes. "Look out!" he warned a few minutes later. "Here come those red varmints."

The Indians on their swift ponies had raced along to the left of the marshal and his companion and were now closing in on them. "You take care of them, Tex, while I reload my Colts." "That, my friend, will be a pleasure."

A couple of shots from the warrior's rifles narrowly missed them by inches as Texas Jack raised his Winchester to his shoulder and fired. The two leading Indians stopped dead in their tracks, let out shrieks of pain, and toppling off their ponies, lay still. One of them was Black Wolf. The other four Indians reined in their mounts, hesitated, then wheeled suddenly and made off in a cloud of dust.

"You'll be as good as me at this shooting game," grinned Wild Bill. "Nice shots. Guess we won't be bothered by those four again," he said as his eyes followed the fast retreating redskins. Drawing over to where the dead Blackfeet lay he gazed down at the sub-chief. "Well, that takes care of Black Wolf and puts an end to his little game," he murmured. "Say, Tex," he added, "I suggest you ride one of these Indian mustangs to relieve the pressure on Gypsy."

The Texan jumped off the sorrel mare and swung his long leg over a little pony. At the sight of his great, tall friend astride the small mustang, Bill broke into merry laughter. "Wonder if I can lengthen these stirrups," Tex said in amusement. "I always thought the Blackfeet were supposed to be tall, but if I put my feet in these stirrups as they are, my knees will be up under my chin. A fine way for a Texan to ride!" he added indignantly.
After Texas Jack had lengthened the stirrups as much as possible they set off in the direction of the Blackfeet encampment. "And now, Bill, perhaps you'll tell me why I was attacked by those Blackfeet. Why, I'm riding to save their chief."

"Actually, Tex, it's very serious. Black Wolf has been stirring up the warriors, trying to get them to go on the warpath, but as you know, Chief Soaring Eagle is all for keeping the peace. But the old boy has fallen ill. When Black Wolf heard his chief had asked for medical aid from our people and that a scout was going to carry the medicine to Soaring Eagle, he thought it was an excellent opportunity of killing the scout and preventing the Chief from having the medicine. If Soaring Eagle died Black Wolf would have been Chief and we would have had a war on our hands. What is it—quinine?"

His friend nodded. "Yep. The old feller's got prairie fever." Some hours later they

drew near to the Blackfeet village. The white men were greeted in a friendly manner and escorted to the painted teepee of chief Soaring Eagle.

Soaring Eagle was lying on some buffalo robes. His bronzed forehead was bathed in beads of perspiration. He raised his hand weakly in a gesture of friendly greeting. "Howdy, Chief," smiled the marshal kneeling beside the sick Indian. "Your old friend, Texas Jack Omohundro has brought you the white man's medicine. Soaring Eagle smiled his thanks. Bill and Tex decided to stay and look after the Chief until he recovered. The day he could sit up the two white men took their leave of him. He grasped their hands warmly as he said:

"My brothers, Man-Who-Shoots-Fast, and The Big One, have saved the life of Soaring Eagle. He will never forget. My heart is sad to think that some of my people tried to kill you, but the Great Spirit gave you power to punish them and they will trouble you no more. Because of your kindness to me my tribe will never sound the war drums against your people while I live." Wild Bill smiled. "That's good news, Chief. We'll come and smoke the pipe with you again soon."

The Texan turned to Soaring Eagle. "Have you such as thing as a large horse I could borrow, Chief?" The Indian's eyes crinkled at the corners with amusement. "The Big One find small pony bad to ride, eh? My brother shall have my horse, he is big and black. Take it as a gift from Soaring Eagle. And now, farewell my friends."

"Thanks a lot, Chief. Now I can ride in comfort," laughed the big Texan swinging into the saddle. "So long." "Bye, Chief," waved Wild Bill. Turning to his friend he said with a grin. "Come on, Big One, I'll race you back down the trail if that horse can stand the strain!"

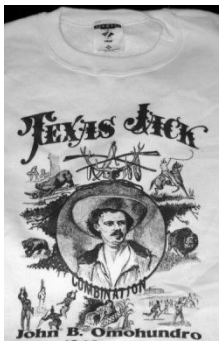
Next week—Wild Bill lost in the desert!

NEXT *SCOUT* ISSUE INFORMATION

The deadline for the November 2009 issue of *The Scout* is November 15, 2009. Please send ideas and materials to our Guest Editors: Margaret Jones and Peggy Greene

18329 Loxahatchee River Road
Jupiter, FL 33458
mgreene39@hotmail.com

"Texas Jack" Must-haves



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NOW'S THE TIME TO GET YOUR ORDER IN!

PLAN AHEAD FOR CHRISTMAS AND ROUNDUP!

ME AN' OLD PAINT…October 2007

By: Driftin' AaronG

Me an' Old Paint, we're two of a kind
Born different from all the rest, we're not blind

We rode 'cross the prairie and over ever' hill
To find our direction we couldn't remain still

It was so long ago that we both rode away
To be driftin' never wishing to stay

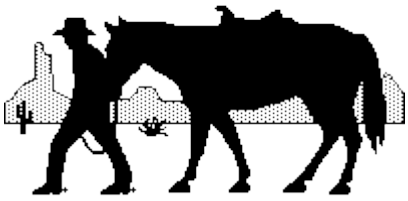
To find our path that we knew awaited us at ever' turn
Trying to keep a smile while watching our camp fire burn

It's been a long ol' road ever' where we been
Wondrin' all this time if we still had any kin

The years have come an' gone, an' we're still on the trail
Jus' me an' Ol' Paint ridin' over ever' hill an' dale

We both been happy an' sad, but it's all been fun
Always travelin' together in all the rain and sun

We both feel a little old an' gray now, but I've made myself a bet
To travel just one more day 'til we reach our last remembered sunset



Among the things that I find interesting are discovering new places that Texas Jack can be found in. These include books, newspapers, dime novels, online sources, etc…. Over the next few issues of the Scout, it is my hope that we can help to identify new items and to share them in these pages, and perhaps on the blog site (http://texasjack.wordpress.com) and webpage (www.texasjack.org). There are several books to review that have been written in the last decade, excerpts from books published early in the last century, and news about plans to reprint a Dime Novel.

A few years ago a very complete list of past articles was printed in an issue of the *Scout*. It is time to update that effort and make it available to a larger base of researchers too.

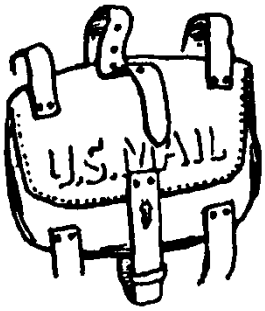
While I realize that still—most persons have not heard of Texas Jack Omohundro—yet as an organization we have made many strides to turn that around in nearly 30 years of activity. And there is a lot more to do as well.

I know that this wish is shared by many of the readers of the *Scout* as well. If so, and you want to join in the effort, please drop me a line. I can be reached easily by sending an email to: info@texasjack.org .

In a lot of ways, the values and life that Texas Jack depicted publicly were valued highly by those who knew him. We too fall into that group. Let's share the wealth!

Larry Tyree

PLEASE VISIT THE NEW AND IMPROVED TEXAS JACK ASSOCIATION WEBSITE!
http://www.texasjack.org



FROM THE MAILBAG

May 20, 2009

Members of the Texas Jack Association,

I am almost 95 years old (Sept. 29) and have been around the world and from Alaska to the tip of South America in Chile. In addition I have visited all 50 states and spent a year in China as a Lt. Colonel in the Army and four years in Mexico for the US Dept. of Agriculture. Oh yes, I forgot to mention my visit to Melbourne, Australia, en route to China, via India. I retired from the military and the US Dept of Agriculture in 1976, to take the job of Executive V.P. of the National Association of Federal Veterinarians.

So much for my background.

I participated in the Texas Jack Association annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee in the mid '80s. My father was a native of Suggs Creek, Tennessee, he moved to Wellington, KS in 1900 and I was born Sept. 29, 1914.

I have enjoyed a long and prosperous life, moved to Denver in the mid 80s and joined the Texas Jack Association. It is a great association, particularly from a family participation stand point.

I want to wish all of the T.J.A. members a long and happy life. My wife Marie is 96 years old and we are enjoying life here in Arizona. We wish you could bring the TJA Annual Meeting to Phoenix but I doubt if that would be practical. Enjoy.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Omohundro, Sr.
19303 N. New Tradition Rd, Apt. 109
Sun City West, AZ 85375

TEXAS JACK IN PAPERBACK

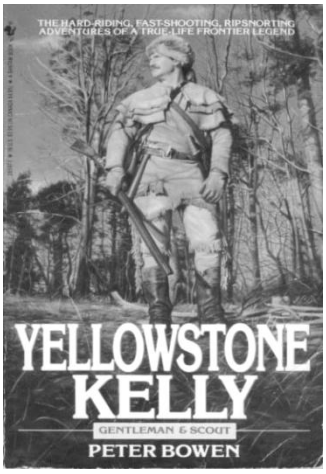
A book review by Larry Tyree
"YELLOWSTONE KELLY", Bantam Books, NY, 1990
By Peter Bowen

I found this paperback while browsing in a local bookstore a few years ago, and as I was looking through the book I stumbled on "Texas Jack" in the content. You can imagine my surprise to see the name associated with someone that I have never even heard of, much less considered that "Yellowstone Kelly" and "Texas Jack" would have ever met. So I bought the book and embarked on a real fun read.

Luther S. (Yellowstone) Kelly, was a real person from history. He was a contemporary of Texas Jack's and was involved in the northern plains as a scout in the Yellowstone area and in Indian wars for a period of time in the 1870s.

By reading this paperback, I do not suggest that I learned anything new about Texas Jack. In fact, I believe that virtually everything that is said about him is pure imagination. In that regard it would not be much different from the hundreds of Dime Novels, Paper Stories, Penny Dreadfuls, and so on.

Buffalo Bill comes into the narrative in the first few paragraphs of the book. Shortly after, Texas Jack's name comes up as an acquaintance. The first description of Texas Jack is on page 56 where Jack is associated with having tracked down Quanah Parker, the Comanche leader of renown. The famous fight at Adobe Walls on June 2, 1874, occurred, but the Staked Plains Comanches could not have been associated with Jack, as he was just finishing a tour with Buffalo Bill and the Troupe in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Very soon after that he went to prepare for a hunting trip with the Earl of Dunraven in the 1874-75 season, and thereupon joined his wife Mlle. Morlacchi and her troupe in May of 1875. This spanned the period of what is known as the Red River War, and Jack was obviously engaged in other matters.



Despite its historical inaccuracy, the author seems to be taking the approach of a genre of western writing which assumes liberties and borrows many names in spinning the yarn. At one point Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack are involved planning a hunting trip for an English Duke. I found that I was torn between belief and incredulity. Belief-- in the supposed hunting trip to Yellowstone with the Duke of Ironheath because it seems so plausible knowing what we do about some of the other hunting trips in which Jack was involved. Incredulity-- because of having never heard of that particular Duke involved in Jack's life. He also portrays Jack's writing ability:

> *"Jack was a well-spoke feller, but his writing looked like he done it with the pencil held like a stabbing knife and his spelling was a wonder to see."*

If you have ever seen his handwriting, you know that the above statement is fanciful to say the least. But the story, while skirting around the real and plodding straight ahead into a made-up

history, is entertaining. Perhaps the nicest thing though… was that Texas Jack Omohundro was referred to time and again, and he played a major part in the yarn.

Please do not misunderstand me… the book is quite interesting to read. It is pleasing also to see the references, however imagined, to Texas Jack. The author actually wrote this as part of a series of four: Imperial Kelly, Kelly and the Three-toed Horse, Kelly Blue, and Yellowstone Kelly.

The flavor of the Old West and the times were caught up in the tale, and one did feel transported back. At times it was like a television drama of the 1960s. The thing that worked was of course Texas Jack being involved. I knew it was not the real guy, but somehow it didn't matter because there was still a presence, an essential spark of the real western hero that shone through.

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City of Golden

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http://geology.about.com/od/geology_co/ig/goldencologeo/goldenoverview.htm

Red Rocks Amphitheater near Golden

Dinosaur Ridge south of Golden

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The Texas Jack Scout

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