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## The Rise and Fall of George Armstrong Custer

By Marshall Brown

On December 5th, 1839, only six and a half years before the birth of Texas Jack Omohundro, George Armstrong Custer was born. He was a highly esteemed United States Army officer and cavalry commander during the U.S. Civil War and Indian wars. At 22 years of age, Custer graduated from West Point. Interestingly enough though, he ranked last in his class at the time of graduation. That same year, Custer engaged in the First Battle of Bull Run where he began to provide a positive impact on the Army and in turn, a reputation for himself. Within one year, Custer had already been promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and had developed powerful connections with high-ranking officers in the military. With his new-found rank and command of an entire cavalry, General Custer led his troops into what would later be known as the famous Battle of Gettysburg and the Battle of Culpeper Court House.



*Custer Memorial at his birthplace in New Rumley, Ohio  
Brian M. Powell*

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4449730>

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**from the Editor's Desk...**



Hello TJA members, I'm happy to be this *Scout's* guest editor. I am currently a college student in California. I was always interested in hearing about the U.S. west-ward expansion and manifest destiny. A name that always came up in these lessons and discussions was George Armstrong Custer. I was surprised to learn that George Custer was just a few years older than Texas Jack. It is interesting that both men have similarities in the stories, but each took their own unique direction in life.

In this *Scout* I wanted to take members through a brief history of George Custer's life. He led a complex and interesting life during one of the most difficult and complicated times in American history. There are plenty of tales told of his life, many of which come from his wife after his death, that show he was a kind and sophisticated man. Based on these tales, he seems like he was a good man. Take this quote from his book *My Life on the Plains* for an example, "I would rather have a good education and no money, than to have a fortune and be ignorant." Conversely, in a time of war, Custer was known to be ruthless. A strong and fierce threat not only to the enemy, but even to his own men. See this quote from the same book, "I would be willing, yes glad, to see a battle every day during my life." I believe both his great success and his numerous failures were a result of precarious balance between these two parts of him.

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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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*Continued from page 2*

I wanted to take a moment to thank my mother Carole Brown for finding a particularly amazing article discussing the death of George Custer featuring Texas Jack. The article is from a newspaper released shortly after Custer's death. What makes it so interesting is that the writer managed to get an interview with Texas Jack himself discussing the event. Additionally, I wanted to thank Kristal Ontiveros for her help in proofreading and revising the final draft of this article. Lastly, I thank Linda Omohundro for all her tremendous work on these *Scouts* and for guiding me along the way. She is certainly the key to the success of *The Texas Jack Scout*. I hope you enjoy learning and reading about George Custer as much as I did. I look forward to seeing everyone at the next Roundup!

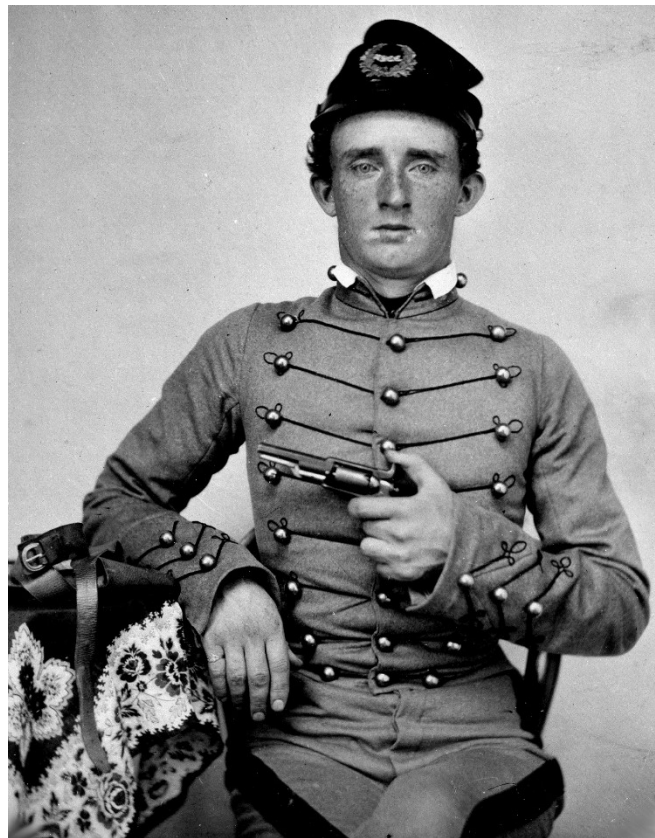
*Marshall Brown, Guest Editor*

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*Continued from page 1*

Needless to say, General Custer was a strong leader and played an exceptionally prominent role in the American Civil War. Despite being wounded in battle, Custer continued to rise within the Army ranks and continued to gain popularity thus, spreading his influence in the Union Army system. Finally, in 1865, Custer was engaged in a pivotal role in General Robert E. Lee's 1865 surrender to Ulysses S. Grant. In fact, the table used to write that the surrender of the Civil War terms was a gift to Custer's wife for his service.

After the Civil War ended, Custer's story advanced westward towards the same area Texas Jack knew so well. Just a year after the conclusion of the Civil War, Custer's services were requested to deal with the rising issues of the Cheyenne. He was immediately appointed Lieutenant Colonel, of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, in Kansas at Fort Riley. After aiding the fort for several months, Custer was



*George Custer at 20 years old, attending West Point military school. Image Source: <http://www.detroitnews.com/picture-gallery/news/local/michigan-history/2016/03/06/george-armstrong-custers-michigan-ties/81341164/>*

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General George Custer, U.S.A. Library of Congress  
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cwpbh.03110>

dispatched to scout Kansas and Colorado to tackle the mounting affair between the U.S. and Native tribes.

In 1867, George Custer was court-martialed and charged with leaving his command and disciplining three cavalry deserters in such an alleged manner that was considered improper military order and discipline. Witnesses would become the focal point in the final judgement on the case. As so, numerous people proceeded to testify that Custer had authorized his men to track down and shoot the deserters on sight without any trial. The latter proving to be problematic as the law dictates that each man is *guaranteed* a right to a trial. Custer clearly chose to ignore this thus, taking away such given right. The General defended himself disclosing proof that he had statements from his commanding officers authorizing such force. Additionally, he expressed to the court that after this display of power against the three deserters, not a single man attempted to desert the cavalry from there on out. However, despite his defense, the court concluded him guilty of all charges. While Custer's ruthless approach to war was getting him into hot water continuously, there was no denying that

his skills and experience was invaluable in this time of turmoil. Within a matter of months, Custer was reinstated and utilizing his notorious skills on the frontier in a winter campaign against the Cheyenne.

In what is known as the first major success for the U.S. in the Indian wars, Custer was discharged to lead his 7th Cavalry Regiment against Black Kettle of the Southern Cheyenne. Black Kettle was known as a peacemaker, working in conjunction with U.S. forces to create an amicable existence for his people. However, the tribe became a target of Custer, and his men, when his scouts discovered a group of marauders that directed them right to Black Kettle's encampment. Custer once again exhibited his ruthlessness as a leader. He would ensure to do anything and everything within his power to come out victorious, while minimizing his losses.

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Consider this quote from Custer himself in his book *My life on the Plains*:

“Indians contemplating a battle, either offensive or defensive, are always anxious to have their women and children removed from all danger...For this reason I decided to locate our [military] camp as close as convenient to [Chief Black Kettle's Cheyenne] village, knowing that the close proximity of their women and children, and their necessary exposure in case of conflict, would operate as a powerful argument in favor of peace, when the question of peace or war came to be discussed.”



*General Custer and some of his favorite scouts. Image Source:*  
<http://www.wyomingtalesandtrails.com/custerbknife.jpg>



THE SEVENTH U.S. CAVALRY CHARGING INTO BLACK KETTLE'S VILLAGE AT DAYLIGHT, NOVEMBER 27, 1868.—[SEE PAGE 511.]

*Custer and his cavalry advance on Black Kettle and his tribe.*

*Source: Harper's weekly, v. 12, 1868 Dec. 19, p. 804.*

*Image source: library of congress*

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*Black Kettle, prominent leader of the Southern Cheyenne and a few of his associates.*  
*Source: Unknown photographer. Image Source: Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, Plains Indian raiders: the final phases of warfare from the Arkansas to the Red River, with original photographs by William S. Soule. University of Oklahoma Press, 1st edition, 1968, ISBN 0806111755, p189.*

While Custer and the military did attempt to minimize losses to the unarmed populations of the tribes, many deaths were inevitable for the women and children of said tribes. There is uncertainty in the number of those killed in the battle of Cheyenne however, many estimate that the number matches the that of warriors killed in action. While there were several American cavalymen lost, Custer had great success employing his military strategies along the Washita River. In fact, this victory alone assisted the United States enforcement of large portion in the Southern Cheyenne into reservations.

Shortly after the decisive victory, in 1870, Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry next task was the reconstruction effort in Kentucky. Their primary objective during this time was to aid the federal government in suppressing the insurgency of the Ku Klux Klan. Many chapters of the Klan arose and were attempting to establish white supremacy in the state through violence and intimidation. The government's fight against this insurgency was the passing of enforcement acts which intended to limit the growth and abilities of the KKK and encourage prosecution efforts. The suppression attempts were relatively successful and while they did not eradicate the white supremacist seditious exploits completely, they did note there was a significant decline of the KKKs central organizational structure.

In 1873, Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry were again relocated westward to the Dakota Territory in the Northern Plains. The purpose of the cavalry's expedition was to survey a route along the Yellowstone River for the Northern Pacific Railroad. During this expedition, Custer and his company had their first recorded engagement with the Lakato Sioux. Custer and the cavalry finished the expedition later that year, reaching Montana Territory and returning down

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the Yellowstone River and thus returning to Dakota territory. Riding on the success of their recent scouting endeavor, the cavalry was enlisted to yet again scout uncharted territories. This time the orders led them to the Black Hills of South Dakota in an attempt to find an advantageous location for a fort and establish routes. Custer and his men set out on the expedition and had no substantial issues along the way. With a suitable location found, camp was erected. This camp location would eventually go on to become the town Custer, South Dakota. Minute discoveries of gold in this area led to a massive gold rush in the area. This influx of people greatly angered the Sioux Indians who had been promised protection of this land by the U.S. government. With their work having been completed, the 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry set out to return to Fort Lincoln in North Dakota.

In 1876, tensions between the Sioux and the U.S. were at an all-time high. The government attempted to buy out the Sioux from their land, but they refused. As a result, the government retaliated by setting a date of January 31, 1876 in which the Sioux must leave the land and head towards a reservation. However, they were either unable or unwilling to move at that time. Consequently, President Ulysses S. Grant set in motion a three-pronged expedition against the Sioux. General George Crook, Officer John Gibbon, and General Custer would all lead their own command and surround the population, sanctioning a swift victory. Custer, being the aggressor that he was, approached the population faster than the other commanders. He came about a large village and ordered an immediate surprise attack. However, Custer vastly underestimated the strength and numbers of the tribe. Nearly every member under General Custer's command died that day. It is said that only one man, one of Custer's scouts named Curley, managed to make it out alive. Additionally, one horse named Comanche made it through

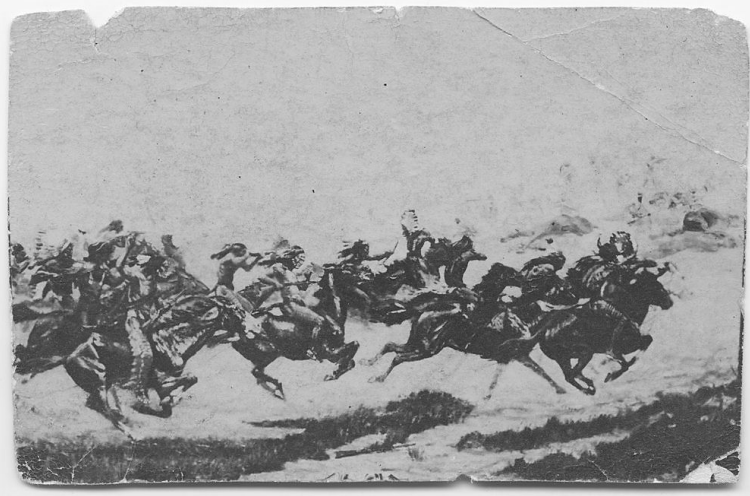


*Left-General Custer's scout "Curley", the reputed sole survivor of the Battle of Little Bighorn. A. E. Brininstool, Sept. 1913, on Custer battlefield.*



*Right-Comanche, the reported only 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry horse to survive the Battle of Little Bighorn, 1887 photographed by John C. H. Grabill, Library of Congress.*

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the massacre. This fatal mistake was Custer's greatest misstep. His aggressive military strategies were no match for the sheer number of warriors present that day. While the cavalry had little chance of success, resorting to using their own horses as cover to delay the inevitable, they fought to their deaths. The epic bloodbath became known as "Custer's Last Stand".

*Custer's Last Stand: Painted in 1876, a depiction of the climax of the battle of Little Bighorn. Painted by Theodore H. Pitman. <https://www.kshs.org/index.php?url=km/items/view/305139>*

Custer is often painted as a hero of his time and fought for the ideals of America. However, he is not without fault. His bellicose and impulsiveness had inconvenienced him many times throughout his career and those same traits ultimately lead to his demise. At the time of his death, George Custer was only 36 years old meaning at the time, Texas Jack was just 29 years old. The article following this paragraph was released shortly after the day of this massacre. At the time there were many accusations and speculations as to what happened but ultimately only a handful of facts arose from these conversations. The article is followed by an interview with Texas Jack. In this interview, it seems that Jack infers that the scouts may deserve a share of the blame. Perhaps had they assessed the situation advantageously or gathered more information, Custer would have made finer decisions. In conclusion, Texas Jack offered his superior skills and knowledge so that a massacre of this nature would never happen again.

The following are resources that elaborate on the story of Custer:

*THE DAILY GRAPHIC*, NEW YORK, SATURDAY JULY 8, 1878

DEPRECATING THE ENDEAVORS TO MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OUT OF THE DEATH OF A BRAVE MAN "TEXAS JACK'S" DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY - AN OLD FRONTIERSMAN ON THE SITUATION.

Washington, July 8 - The editorial comments in the *HERALD* and *SUN* of yesterday upon the massacre of Custer and his troops are ridiculed by everyone here conversant with army and Indian Affairs. This war is no more the outgrowth of General Grant's peace policy than it is on the constitutional provision excluding "Indians not taxed" from the enumeration for the apportionment of Representatives to the respective States. The President has not directed responsibility for the war and had these battles been successful the *Herald* and the *Sun* writer - for the articles are apparently written by the same hand - would have cracked up Custer to the skies and said not a word about the President useless to disparage him. But your morning contemporaries seem to go upon the principle that every disaster must be debited to the President's account and every victory to someone else.

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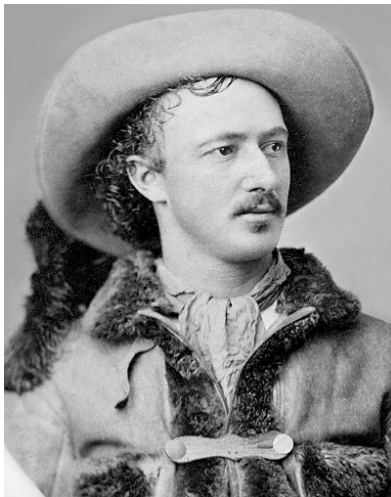
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Again, General Terry is blamed for his plan of campaign - that is, for marching upon the Indians in three columns - while not a work of censure is passed upon Custer for dividing his command in the presence of the enemy and not waiting until Major Reno could get into position. The literary men who are writing on subjects of which they know nothing ought to be told that they are making themselves ridiculous. Some of them talk as if there was some disgrace in Custer's serving under Terry. Will some of these wise men of Gotham tell us how long since it has been considered beneath the dignity of a lieutenant-colonel in the army to take orders and serve under a brigadier-general? The fact is Custer could not have commanded this expedition even if Terry had decided not to have accompanied it, for in that case General Crook would have assumed command. And if neither General Terry nor General Crook accompanied the expedition, and had the detail from it remained the same, General Gibbon, who is a full colonel while Custer was only lieutenant-colonel, would as senior officer have had the command. There is nothing extraordinary or disgraceful in Lieutenant General Sheridan receiving orders from General Sherman, and serving under an officer two grades above him.

The talk about General Terry not being a professional soldier is the veriest bosh. That officer has been continuously in service since May 7, 1861, with the exception of the forty-one days from August 7 to September 17 in that year, and he has been a full brigadier-general in the United States army since January 15, 1865. Will someone tell us how many years' service in the army it requires to make a man a professional soldier? In any proper sense of the term General Terry is a professional soldier, even if he did not graduate from the Military Academy at West Point, and I venture to assert that every officer in the army regards General Terry as a true soldier.

There is now no use in blaming anyone for the massacre of Custer and his troops, for if there is anybody to blame, he has wiped out all scores with his blood.

The whole moral of the catastrophe will be thrown away unless people cease bickering about spelt milk and loudly demand a proper increase in the army to meet the emergency.



*Texas Jack Omohundro, 1872*  
*Image Source: The James E. Taylor Album*

### INTERVIEW WITH "TEXAS JACK" - HIS VIEW REGARDING THE MASSACRE

Philadelphia Branch office of the *Graphic*, July 7 - As soon as the report of the massacre of General Custer and his gallant band had been confirmed, your correspondent called for some further information upon Texas Jack, the famous scout, who is at present sojourning in this city. He was found at a hotel patronized almost entirely by men from the far West, and at which Donald McKay, the hero of the Modoc war is also stopping with his band of Warm Spring, Chippewa, and Cherokee Indians. Texas Jack readily consented to furnish The *Graphic* with his views upon the subject of the recent massacre.

John B. Omohundro, better known as Texas Jack is a magnificent specimen of the physical manhood produced by the life of a hunter. He stands over six feet in height, is as straight as an arrow, and his curling dark hair hangs upon his shoulders in true border style. Personally, he is very temperate and never

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touches a drop of liquor, the result being shown in his firm, elastic step and piercing eyes. For more than twenty years he has been a hunter, during which time he has roamed over our entire Western territory, and for several years he was a scout in the employ of the Government - a position which he relinquished about three years ago to go upon the stage with William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill"). The latter was recently called from his dramatic experience to act as Government scout, and is now serving in that capacity in Montana.

I asked Texas Jack to state his ideas upon the subject of Custer's death and to give a description of the region in which it occurred. He replied as follows: "I cannot believe that the five companies commanded by General Custer were massacred in the manner described in the newspaper, without any escaping. Such a thing has no precedent in the history of border warfare. Even in the Mountain Meadow massacre, where a handful of men were surrounded by an overwhelming force both of Indians and white men, several escaped with little or no injury, while the party who attacked them supposed there was not one left to tell the tale. Coming down to a later period, I know personally of several occasions in which parties were attacked by Indians, who in some cases outnumbered them five to one, yet there were always some who escaped.

"There is another point. I cannot understand how Muggins Taylor, the scout who is reported to have first brought the news in, knew so much about the affair. He certainly could not have been with Custer, and if he was with the other seven companies commanded by Major Reno could not have seen anything, as they were on the other side. I am not acquainted with Taylor, although I have seen him. When I was out in that country last fall, he was not attached to General Custer's command, and I do not think that he is at present, although he may be.

"I will show you how the land lies out there." Taking a pencil, the scout rapidly made a rough sketch on a piece of paper, and then proceeded:

"This is a portion of the Big Horn and Little Horn valleys, in the latter of which the fight occurred. This first line is Rosebud Creek, the one beyond it is the Little Horn River, which flows into the Big Horn. The latter flowing into the Yellowstone, which empties into the Missouri about sixty miles from the junction. This other line, which I draw diagonally across the rivers is the trail up which Custer must have come, and which touches at Fort Ellis, beyond the Yellowstone River. Near this the Crow Indians are situated, who are friendly to the whites. The large tract between these lines is several hundred miles square, and is infested by the Sioux, who are unfriendly, and who murder any person found there, whether white or red.

"General Custer with his five companies had evidently pushed his way up the trail beyond the Rosebud to the camp, which was upon the side of the Little Big Horn River. Indian camps are generally in a canyon or a valley as inaccessible as possible. When a charge is made into an Indian camp they usually run and will seldom stand up for a fight. In this case, however, they must have stood and had a hand-to-hand conflict. If the number of lodges in the camp is reported correctly, according to the usual mode of Indian living there must have been over 20,000 persons there, of whom, perhaps, 5,000 were warriors and fighting men.

"When Custer dashed in at the head of five companies who could not have numbered more than 325 men, he probably was not aware of the real strength of the Indians. Who his scouts are, I don't know, but they should certainly have found out as nearly as possible the number who opposed them before they charged. If he did really know it, he probably thought to surprise them and be reinforced by Major Reno before they recovered. Whichever it was the result has been the

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worst massacre which has taken place in the far West for many years. I only hope it will have the effect of causing greater severity in dealing with the Indians, who are perfectly untamable.

"The band of Sioux under Sitting Bull probably numbers 3,000 warriors, and Crazy Horse has half as many more. These are very ferocious, and wage a continual war on the whites and also upon any peaceable Indians who come within their reach. They can never be kept down, and the Government should send a sufficient force to clean them out entirely. Whenever General Sheridan needs my services as a guide, I shall be glad to go and help him all I can, as I know the country thoroughly. Donald McKay would also go and many others, no doubt, would be willing to volunteer their services. Custer was almost idolized by all who knew him, and his cruel murder will cause much sadness among his many friends."

### *The Bismarck Tribune*

Bismarck, D. T., Aug. 26, 1874.

#### NUGGETS

There is a new, direct, and well marked trail from Bismarck to the Black Hills, made by the return of the expedition. Gold in the grass roots, and at a depth of eight feet is not bad, particularly when the amount yielded is \$100 per day to each miner.

The best way for Montanians to reach the Black Hills gold region will be to come down the Missouri and take the Government trail from Bismarck. Running Antelope was right when he said the white man would want the Black Hills country, because of its fertile valleys, when they came to see it.

The men who made the Black Hills gold discoveries reside at Bismarck, and will accompany the first expedition to the new El Dorado, which will be fitted out at Bismarck.

While there are immense tracts of bad lands south and west of the Black Hills, Custer's expedition reports only five miles of bad lands between Bismarck and the Hills.

The country from Bismarck to the Black Hills is well watered by streams whose banks furnish an abundance of fuel, and their valleys fine grazing. Unquestionably the route via Bismarck is the shortest, safest, and best.

The distance from Bismarck to the Black Hills is only a trifle farther than from Moorhead to Ft. Garry, only a trifle farther than from Moorhead to Bismarck. Both of these trips are made in winter without the least difficulty.

The Black Hills gold region is wholly in Dakota, though the Hills were entered by the expedition from the west side—from the Territory of Wyoming. The expedition came out of them at the northeast—the point nearest Bismarck.

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Bismarck merchants are already laying in a stock of mining tools, and miners' outfits. An expedition will undoubtedly leave this point this fall intending to winter in the Hills where there is an abundance of game of all kinds.

Mitchell's new Atlas of the United States, sold in Bismarck by P. B. Gavitt, just published by Zeigler & Mc Curdy, gives the correct location of Harney's Peak. Custer's Gulch is seven miles south of it, on a little stream emptying into the South Fork of the Cheyenne.

While the country south of the Black Hills is over run by hostile bands from the Red Cloud, Whetstone, Yankton, and other agencies, their operations do not extend to the region north of the Hills. That is neutral ground, and is seldom visited, and then only for hunting.

The very fact that Custer is in command at Ft. Lincoln guarantees immunity from the depredations of hostile bands to a country a hundred miles in extent. It is said the hostiles located south of the Black Hills have offered a reward of a hundred ponies for Custer's head. He is a terror to them.

The Black Hills gold region is in the Department of Dakota, and the two new military posts which are to be established, one on the Little Missouri, and one near the Hills, will be established from this way, the material being hauled from Bismarck. The Government is responsible for the gold discoveries, and will feel bound to protect the settlers who will take advantage of those discoveries.

Running Antelope, Two Bears and other Sioux chiefs at the Grand River Agency, have done their level best to keep their young men at home while Custer's expedition has been out, determined that if difficulties arose or depredations were committed, they should not be blamed for it. And they succeeded. Up to the fifteenth of August Custer had not seen a single hostile band—not a shot had been fired— except at game.

The territory lying north of the Black Hills is what is known as neutral ground. It is not claimed by any tribe! —is not included in the Black Hills reservation, and is never occupied by the Indians, and but seldom visited by them. The hostile tribes, except Sitting Bull who is located near Ft. Peck, are located south of the Black Hills—their agencies are south and the depredations committed by them have been in localities south of the Hills.

Gen. Forsythe says in his Black Hills report that all attempts to enter the Hills from the east or south would be futile; they can only be entered from the north or west. The Sioux City Journal says the country between Cheyenne and the Black Hills is barren, marked on the maps as sand hills; and proved to be barren and is therefore to be avoided by immigrants. The Journal alleges that via Sioux City is the nearest route to reach the Black Hills, and yet it admits that people must go from there several hundred miles up the river to Fort Randall, and when they get to Randall, they are ten miles further from the gold region than when at Bismarck.

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General Custer's prized kill, a bear, hunted during the Black Hills Expedition of 1874, Gold Miners in the Black Hills, Source: William H. Illingworth 

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### HEROES AN' PARDS...February 2011

"Tribute to the Cowboys and Indians Stars"

By Driftin' AaronG

*I grew up going to all the movies an' especially the Saturday Matinee  
To see all the cowboys an' Indians in all the action they'd often portray*

*John Wayne, James Stewart, Charlton Heston an' so many, many more  
Randolph Scott, Joel McCrea, Robert Mitchum an' they all knew the score*

*Today they star in our living rooms on the wide television screen  
While we sit back an' watch an' think of the past it sometimes may seem*

*Roy Rogers, Rex Allen and Gene Autry in the gallant roles they play  
Glenn Ford, Brian Keith and Audie Murphy keepin' all the outlaws at bay*

*The movies that kept us alive an' excited in our youth so long ago  
Of the nineteenth century an' the cowboy way that gave such a good show*

*Gary Cooper, Alan Ladd, Gregory Peck gave us all their hard work an' time  
Walter Brennan, Lorne Green, Michael Landon gave us their hearts that would often  
shine*

*While good cowboys and bad rode across the screen when history was at its best  
Warm hearted stories and adventures of ever' kind that withstood ever' viewers test*

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Clark Gable, Henry Fonda, Andy Divine gave the audience a thrill of ever' kind  
Jack Palance, Rod Cameron, James Arness an' Ben Johnson, real cowboys we all could  
find

The years have come an' gone an' our cowboys have rode the movie set  
To give us excitement with ever' adventure to keep us on the edge of our seat I'd never  
forget

An' let's not forget Errol Flynn, Gilbert Roland, Jeff Chandler with more adventures ever'  
day

William Holden, Tony Curtis, Burt Lancaster, all my best ol' pards I'll always say

Of course, like you I've had my favorite cowboys and Indians the way it was meant to  
be

Cochise, Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Black Kettle an' all the rest I'd like to see

To see the end of the Indian nations was a sad thing that left a country with shame  
The treaties that were broken an' the treatment of the tribes, we were all to blame

But with the cowboys an' Indians it was a wonder in my youth to behold  
When the good cowboys rode out to help the Indians and stop the outlaws cold

The wonder of all my cowboy heroes left me with a sigh of pride  
Because over time they shed the light of all the things that had once been set aside

I miss my ol' cowboy pards that are gone now to ride the far away heavenly happy trail  
But to see 'em on the screen I can watch my heroes, an' in my heart I know they'd never  
fail

Off to each new adventure they'd ride hard and proud  
An' to all my heroes I offer a humble thank you as you now wear your heavenly shroud

And so those of you that are gone now an' those still comin' along  
Let me just say you are my heroes an' pards an' you'll live forever with each new  
cowboy song





## Introducing the New Officers of TJA 2018-2020



### PRESIDENT LARRY TYREE



Larry Tyree became the Managing Editor of the *Scout* in June 2003, having joined the Texas Jack Association in 2001. After discovering that the association existed, he was especially thrilled to relive the life and times of Texas Jack through the pages of the *Scout*.

As a child, Larry grew up in Tahiti with his missionary parents. During the ten years that he lived in the South Pacific, he attended French schools and developed fluency in French and Tahitian. When the family moved back to the US he lived in Denver, Colorado, and Independence, Missouri. After graduation from the University of Missouri, Kansas City, Larry and his wife Rene worked for a couple years as Youth Ministers in French Polynesia. Larry then worked with the Boy Scouts of America for over seven years, ending as a Senior District Executive in St. Louis.

In 1985 Larry entered the ministry. After Seminary, he was assigned to Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica. Since 1992 he has worked at the World Headquarters office and currently is Director of Translations. As a result of his previous assignments, Larry now is fluent in five languages. He and his staff work to translate and provide resources in over 19 languages.

Larry's passion for astronomical photography, and international cooking keep him well occupied along with discovering new information about Texas Jack.

Larry and his wife Rene, an electrical engineer with Sprint, have two married children: Katy (mother of their three grandsons), and Matt.

### VICE-PRESIDENT ROB OMOHUNDRO



2018 was our first Roundup. In getting acquainted with everyone (a great bunch) the invariable question was, "How are you related to Texas Jack?" Notice it wasn't IF but HOW. With this last name, there is a connection someplace! Anyhow, as far as I can tell without returning to the big book by Malvern, my great-great-great grandfather, Richard 7E, was grandfather to Texas Jack.

That said, I originally was born in Santa Ana, in southern CA but did most of my growing up in Modesto as dad passed away when I was young. I went to San Jose State University, got a high-tech job, moved away, then God brought me back to San Jose. I had lost my first house but came out better for it in that I gained my sweet Grace as my bride. We have been married now 15 years. We have been members of

## ***The Texas Jack Scout***

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the TJA for some years, made the pilgrimage to Leadville to see Jack's markers, visit my cousin, and also see where my late uncles' homes are. We were encouraged about going to the Roundups mainly through Larry Tyree, and he has been very gracious to have been the one to nominate me for serving as VP. Sacramento was a great experience for the activities, but mainly for getting a chance to meet my extended family. So glad we did. Hope to be of good service with the support and guidance of my co-officers.

### **SECRETARY MELISA BROWN**



Melisa has been a member of The Texas Jack Association since 1990. Texas Jack Omohundro is her great-great-great-uncle. She was elected Secretary at the 2018 Roundup in Sacramento, California. Melisa has attended many Roundups and looks forward to offering her contribution to the Texas Jack Association as the role of Secretary. Melisa resides on the central coast in California near her mother Carole and her sweet little brother Marshall. She graduated from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 2017 with a BS in Animal Science. Melisa currently works at a Humane Society as a Veterinary Assistant where she loves working with dogs and cats. In her free time she enjoys catching up with friends and hanging out at home with her kitty named "Frog."

### **TREASURER RICK OMOHUNDRO**



I was born September 21, 1951, and have lived all my life in the small community of Salt Lick, KY, where I still reside with my wife Nancy. We have one son, Richard Brandon (wife Shannon) and one grandson, Richard Aiden.

I studied at the University of Kentucky and received a BS in Civil Engineering in 1973. I worked for the KY Transportation Cabinet as a design engineer and preconstruction supervisor for 32 years and retired in 2005. My favorite past times include spending time with Aiden, playing golf, and photography.

I became a member of the TJA in 1990 when by happen chance Nancy, Brandon, and I were visiting Leadville at the same time the 1990 Roundup was taking place. We were welcomed into the Association and attended the Roundup and have been members ever since.

I have served one term as the Texas Jack Association president (1996-1998) and this will be my fifth term as treasurer (2012–present).

A big thank you to our new officers for your willingness to serve the Texas Jack Association. We look forward to a great next two years.



The President's  
MESSAGE



The timing of this message, and the passing of my mother come at the same time. She never had the ability to attend a full Texas Jack

Roundup, but did join in the banquet of the 2016 Roundup with her husband and my father Alan Tyree. When I grew up, mom introduced me to Texas Jack, and boy was I proud. She showed me her copy of the Omohundro Genealogical Record, and I learned what I could over the years. When I found out about the Texas Jack Association, Rene and I joined, and so did my parents. She always looked forward to each issue of the *Scout*.

This next year, the Association intends to try to find a cost-effective way to be able to have a part of our webpage where members can download issues of the *Scout*

if they desire. They can also continue to receive the printed version if they prefer. Since it is taking time to work out the details for the secure online downloadable version, beginning in 2019, members will be able to receive the *Scout* by email if they so choose. There will be a place in the membership form every year for members to make their preference.

As always, we look forward to new research into the life and times of Texas Jack, Buffalo Bill, and Wild Bill Hickok. It truly is for me a lot of fun. It is something like unravelling a mystery!

Along with Vice President Rob Omohundro, Treasurer Rick Omohundro, and Secretary Melisa Brown, I look forward to a great year 2019!!

*Larry Tyree, President TJA*

*Photo by Katy (Tyree) Zimmerman.*

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**Next Texas Jack Scout Information**

The deadline for the March 2019 issue of the *Scout* is March 1, 2019.

Please send ideas and materials to our Guest Editor:

**Larry Tyree**

ltyree5353@gmail.com

1844 NE Parks Summit Blvd., Lees Summit, MO 64064

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*Thank you, Larry!*

## The Brief, Legendary Pony Express

By John Thomas Omohundro



*Google photos*

The U. S. has drawn on its early experience in the West to define itself almost since mountain men and explorers began crossing the Mississippi and glass lantern showmen and lecture circuit speakers reported this to avid audiences back East. It's almost impossible for us today, with our interstates and cell phone towers, to imagine what awe the early visitors felt as they prepared to cross the Great Plains, the Rockies, or Death Valley, usually on foot. We admire the vision, courage, and resourcefulness it took to travel into the West and survive. We keep reviewing that past, which really only lasted for about 50 years—from the crossing of the Cumberland Gap to the intercontinental railroad—in hopes of extracting inspiration for the present. Keeping John B. Omohundro's memory alive through the Texas Jack Association and the *Scout* is one way we review that past. Reading about Texas Jack's contemporaries is another.

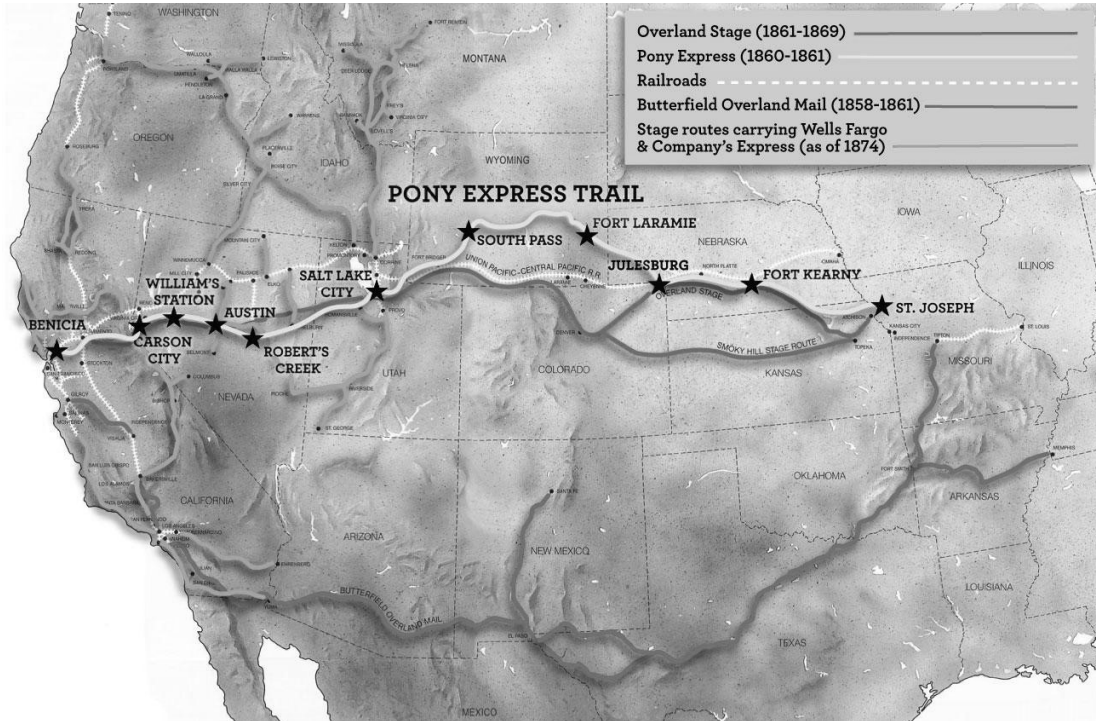
In April, 1860, when John B. was 14 and observing (with what emotion?) preparations for war all around him in the piedmont of Virginia, a youth only a few years older leapt onto a half-wild horse in St. Joseph, Missouri, and galloped into Kansas Territory carrying a few pounds of mail; the Pony Express began. Texas Jack's life was brief, if eventful, and the Pony Express's existence was even briefer, only eighteen months, but also very eventful. Its fame and the legends surrounding it still survive, and we see values in it that we associate with America and wish to emulate.

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We're currently in a myth-busting era of Western history-telling. For every admirable aspect of our Western history that could be celebrated, a horrific one is found beside it. We know too much to romanticize that past. Jim DeFelice, the author of *West Like Lightning: The Brief, Legendary Ride of the Pony Express* (William Morrow, 2018) doesn't romanticize, but he doesn't demonize either. In fact, he just struggles to piece together the story, because all the official records were lost long ago and much of what comes down to us about the Pony Express is hooley.

The total of what can be reasonably established as true about the Pony Express is pamphlet-sized; DeFelice has managed to stretch that out to a full volume by providing context. I enjoyed the side-trips into Lincoln's campaign for President, Jim Bridger's and Kit Carson's careers, President Buchanan's dilemmas anticipating a Southern secession, the violent efforts to make Kansas a free state, and the development of the railroad and telegraph, among many happenings and characters.

As a professional researcher, I appreciate DeFelice's careful sorting of tall tales from likely fact. Another valuable contribution of his Pony Express story is the description of the landscape the riders encountered as they hustled from one station to the next, from St. Joseph through the Kansas, Nebraska, and Utah Territories, to San Francisco. Grasslands, mud, rivers, mountain passes, and salt flats were just some of the terrain. Riders passed through a few forts with trading posts and rode by occasional wagon trains or Indian hunting parties. Otherwise, nothing human. The territories were nearly as undeveloped as when Lewis and Clark explored them in 1804. It wasn't "wilderness" because Indians had lived in and modified it in some ways for thousands of years, but it definitely wasn't "American" yet.



*The 1,900-mile route of the Pony Express as well as some contemporary and subsequent freight lines. Map credit Google photos.*

## The Texas Jack Scout

### The “Pony”

So what do we know about this short-lived mail route? The *Sacramento Union*, at the end of the Pony in October, 1861, reported,

“Through approximately eighteen months of variable weather, Indian disturbances, and almost insurmountable difficulties, ... 308 runs were made, covering a distance of 616,000 miles. On those runs, 34,753 letters were carried, with the loss of only one [packet]. Of the total, 23,356 letters originated in California and 11,397 in the East. Estimated receipts were \$91,404...”

The railroad met the Pony in St Joseph, to swap mail. Postage for a letter to the coast was \$5.00 an ounce at first. The rider carried perhaps 100 pieces of mail plus a stash of Eastern newspapers and unpublished copy for Western papers to use. At first riders took off once a week, later twice a week. They picked up and dropped off mail along their route. The entire ride of 1,900 miles took 10 days on a good run, closer to 15 in winter and during the Paiute War. Still, it was more than twice as fast as the alternative, by steamship through Central America.



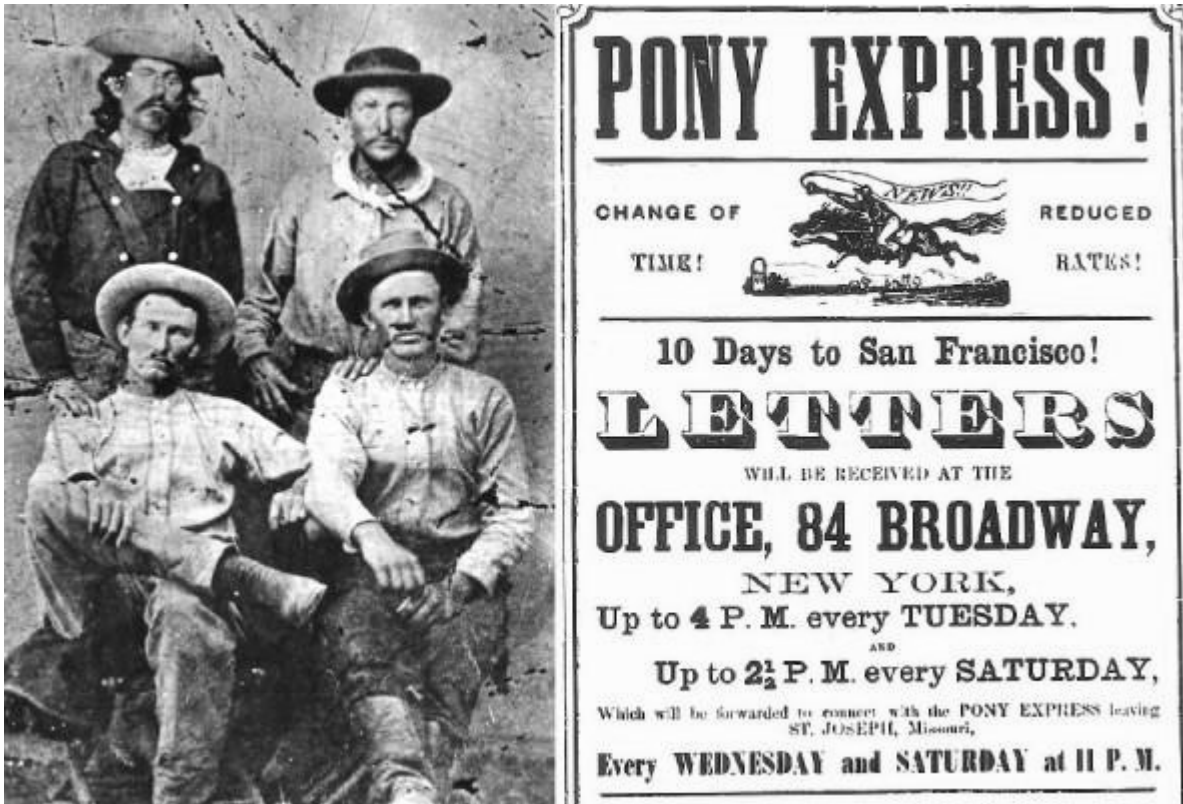
*A letter traveling west to San Francisco on the Pony Express.  
photo credit Google photos*

Pony riders were usually small, young white males. To save weight, they rarely carried guns. If they ran into trouble, they just outran it. They galloped, trotted, or cantered 10-15 miles in about an hour to a way station, where they changed horses and were moving again in three minutes. They repeated this pattern five or six times for a 70-mile shift, arriving at a home station where a new rider took over. The dismounted rider would rest at the station, for an hour or a day, then take over from an east-bound rider and carry mail back over the same route to his starting station. Riders were paid handsomely at \$50 a month plus room and board.

184 stations, composed of a few mostly very rude structures, were built along the trail, each housing a handler and perhaps three horses. Stationmasters at the home stations were the

## The Texas Jack Scout

unsung heroes. They managed horses and riders in their districts, developed the routes, cleared out robbers, and defended the stations from horse thieves.



*Pony riders didn't wear a specific uniform. But they were uniform in themselves, being small, brave, with high endurance. Photo credit Google photos*

### The Businessmen behind the Pony

The Pony Express wasn't the only private express mail service in the nation, but it was a relatively long-distance run, delivered on its promises, and became a celebrity back East. The owners of the Express, Russell, Majors and Waddell, complemented each other's skill in raising money, promoting the business, and administrating it. They knew the Pony would lose money, and they knew it wouldn't last long. They were fulfilling contracts to handle freight for the U. S. government, and they also sought to win its lucrative mail contract. The Pony existed to demonstrate the efficacy of the partners' mail route and the feasibility of covering the great distance. They were always challenged to keep investors happy as their business lost money while waiting for the mail contract to rescue them. They signed promises to pay off debts, then borrowed more money to pay off the promises. Collateralized debt obligations in the 2008 recession look only slightly messier. Competition for the mail contract was intense. Wells, Fargo and Butterfield's Overland Express were bidding too.



*Franking stamp for Russell, Majors and Waddell's company. Photo credit Google photos*

## The Texas Jack Scout

### The End of the Pony

There were telegraph lines throughout the East, and in parts of California, but none in between. In June, 1860, three months after Pony riders began, Western Union won the telegraph contract. The line was completed in October, 1861, and the Pony shut down, as was contractually agreed. The Pony's owners also knew the transcontinental railroad was coming soon, but hoped to nail down a monopoly on local freight movement before the trains arrived, thus controlling prices. Better-capitalized firms like Wells Fargo beat them to it. In the end, the government mail contract, let in July 1861, specified that Wells Fargo, the Overland, and the Pony's company would work together. Lincoln's cabinet was very concerned to keep connections with California during the war.

### The Pards' Role



*A well-known photograph of "the pards." From left: James B. "Wild Bill" Hickok, John B. "Texas Jack" Omohundro, and William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody*

The "pards" are William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, James B. "Wild Bill" Hickok, and John B. "Texas Jack" Omohundro—scouts, guides, and Wild West celebrities, who worked together for awhile and were often photographed together.

In his 1879 autobiography Cody claimed he rode in the Express as an underage lad, that he recovered stolen Express horses from Indians, and that he outwitted cowboy horse thieves. It is more likely he was going to school in Illinois. But Cody was a boon to the Pony, because he celebrated it in his Wild West shows beginning in the 1880s. The first rider to dash around the arena during a show was always a Pony rider, often a genuine veteran whom Cody had tracked down and hired.

Wild Bill Hickok worked for the Pony's owners in Kansas Territory, moving wagon freight and living at a home station. He shot three men who'd come to the station for money they claimed the stationmaster owed them. Perhaps typically for frontier justice, Hickok was acquitted.

Texas Jack was too young to have gone West. He remained in Virginia, enlisting to act as runner during the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864. Unfortunately, when DeFelice discusses Cody's and Buntline's Chicago Wild West show of 1872, only brief

mention is given of Texas Jack, and his name doesn't appear in the index.


### What Endures

As brief as it was, the Pony Express left quite a legacy. Its story has been kept alive in Wild West shows, legends, dime novels, a few legitimate histories, and by Hollywood. For example, in 1953 *The Pony Express* starred a young Charleston Heston. On television in the late 1980s was *Young Riders*, with Stephen Baldwin and Josh Brolin as Cody and Hickok.

## The Texas Jack Scout

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DeFelice points out that Russell, Majors, and Waddell, the owners, were 19th century versions of today's venture capitalists, taking big chances with big money toward a big vision. And failing big. Even today, I think Americans admire the company and its young riders.

“The values that we see in the Pony riders are values we cherish, even if we've never been near a barn, let alone a horse: adventure, speed, determination, endurance. The values of the service itself: dependability against all odds, unflagging commitment to a mission—these are values we too want to emulate...” (p 265): *The Brief, Legendary Ride of the Pony Express* 

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Correction/addition to July 2018 Issue:



Wes Phillips, Terry Omohundro, Sandy Phillips, Judith Phillips enjoying the Saturday evening final event of the 2018 Sacramento Roundup.

Ed. Note- There has been a mistake on the last few *Scout* volume numbers. This one is correct. The others are corrected in the digital forms.

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A VERY MERRY  
CHRISTMAS AND A MOST  
BLESSED HOLIDAY  
SEASON TO ALL!

**The Texas Jack Scout**



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