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Texas Jack, Mythmaker

by C. Rand McKinney

I am often asked to explain to curious friends and acquaintances who Texas Jack was—as are many other TJA members, I’m sure. I usually recount the facts of his remarkable life and his many notable friends. But the other day someone asked me: What really makes Texas Jack special? After all, there are lots of forgotten historical figures.

That got me to thinking. There are probably many different answers, but I have one to offer that perhaps you have not considered: Texas Jack was a mythmaker.

After reading *Mythmakers of the West* by John A. Murray; (Northland Publishing, Flagstaff, AZ; 2001), I have a new appreciation for the Old West in the popular imagination: the mythological West, as opposed to the real, historical American West.

The mythological West is a place of legend and story that has grown over the last two centuries. It started with Lewis and Clark, whose accounts of the unexplored territories of the Louisiana Purchase fired the imagination of a whole nation. Although their accounts were based on direct experience and in-

tended to be factually informative, their language evoked the book of Genesis. They were describing, in Murray’s words, “the American West as a fertile Eden waiting to be re-entered.”

The real Old West existed for perhaps a few hundred years, and reached its zenith in the latter half of the 19th century. The mythical West will exist forever in the popular imagination. In the mythical West, the good guys wear white hats and the bad guys wear black hats (or are “bloodthirsty savages”). In the

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from the Editor's Desk...



It's been a while since I edited *The Scout*. Aside from one issue, I haven't been the editor since 1995-96. I forgot how much fun it can be! I hope you enjoy the articles in this (somewhat slim) issue. There's some exciting news about Texas Jack appearing in the upcoming movie, *Hidalgo*.

Speaking of movies, you might consider seeing *Gods and Generals*, which just came out, if you are a Civil War buff and you can sit through a four-hour movie (mercifully, with intermission)! Based on the book by Jeff Shaara, it's a historically accurate account of the early days of the "recent unpleasantness" (as the war was known in Texas Jack's day). The movie focuses on Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, but Texas Jack's old commander, J.E.B. Stuart, makes a brief appearance. Robert Duvall is excellent as Robert E. Lee.

Thanks for the opportunity to edit *The Scout* once again. Happy Trails!

Rand

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Send to:

Harvey Willard
875 Waterside Lane
Bradenton, FL 34209-7756
hbwillard@aol.com

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The Texas Jack Association
Edna Nees, Secretary
213 Coles Rolling Road
Scottsville, VA 24590-3916
andeseen@aol.com

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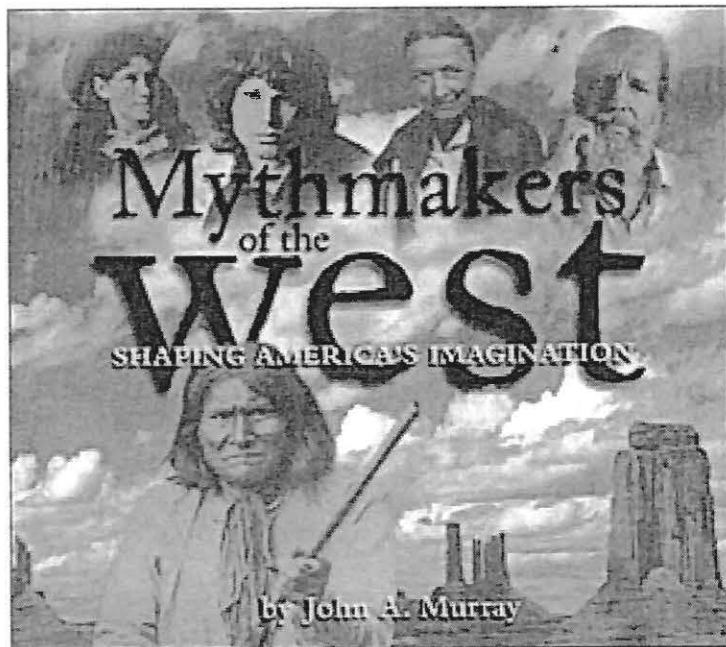
The Texas Jack Association was founded in 1980 to commemorate John B. Omohundro, cowboy, prairie scout, western hunting guide, and Wild West showman, colleague of Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok.

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

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real Old West, life was as fraught with shades of gray and moral uncertainties as it is today. Texas Jack has a special place in the American history, because he was a pioneer both of the real West, and of the mythical West. In fact, he played a pivotal role in the popularization of the Wild West as one of the originators of “the Western” drama. Every John Wayne or Clint Eastwood Western movie can trace its roots back to *The Scouts of the Prairie*.

The mythical West pervades American culture. The values that Americans hold dear were forged on the frontier: courage, self-reliance, freedom, and individualism. Mythic images of the West are also pervasive in art and the media: cowboys with hats, boots, and spurs, Indians with war paint and feathered head-dresses, cattle drives, wagon trains, and so on.



In Murray’s words, “...more than any other province of the country, the West is a realm rich in myth: the age of the fur trappers, the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails, the battles of the Little Bighorn and Apache Pass, the historic cattle drives, the building of the railroads, the era of the homesteaders, the Butterfield-Overland Stage, the marshals of Tombstone, the birth of the desert gambling towns. More so than the dry facts of history, the mythical stories of the West give us personal, immediate insight into who we are, what we believe, how we think, and where we want to go in the future as a people.

England may have its myth of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, Italy may have its legend of Aeneas, and Greece may have its

hoary fable of Troy, but in America we have something quite different, something quite a bit more recent, something very original. The West is our own private dream-world, the spacious, sun-washed repository of some of our most cherished myths.”

As a Western performer in the 1870s, Texas Jack was playing to eastern audiences in the winter, and then returning to the frontier and actually living the role he played on stage. Texas Jack Omohundro is one of a handful of people who can claim to be both a real cowboy and an actor who portrayed a cowboy. In fact, in many of his roles, he was not required to do much in the way of real acting, rather just wear his buckskins and shoot blank rounds from his pistols at whooping “Indians.”

In literature, Texas Jack’s exploits were fictionalized in “dime novels,” along with those of Buffalo Bill Cody, Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp, and others. Lurid, action-packed morality tales, these dime novels

were the predecessors of popular western stories by Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour, and countless others. Dime novels established the traditions of the genre: cowboys versus Indians, gunfighters and sheriffs, stagecoaches rattling across desert landscapes, beset by desperados and outlaws.

Texas Jack was also a figure in factual accounts of the West, such as the Earl of Dunraven's *The Great Divide* and *Hunting in the Yellowstone*. However, Jack was also a skilled writer. He wrote articles for periodicals such as the *New York Herald* and *Spirit of the Times* for eastern audiences hungry for accounts of life on the frontier. So, in addition to being the subject of factual as well as fictional accounts, he was also a correspondent, commentator, and reporter on life in the West, particularly concerning one of his specialties, hunting.

In his brief life, Texas Jack actually lived many of the adventures that were later to become part of the mythology of the West: driving cattle on the Chisolm trail, fighting Indians, guiding hunting parties. However, he is one of the few historical figures who also played a part in the birth of the mythical West. *The Scouts of the Prairie* led to Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, which traveled the world bringing dramatizations of the Wild West to the civilized world. When Thomas Edison filmed the Wild West show, the western film genre was born. From there, descends a long line of film and television shows. Jack played an important early part in both the real and mythical versions of the Old West. For that, he deserves to be remembered.

As Murray says: "Much has changed about the world since the days of Buffalo Bill Cody and Sitting Bull and Annie Oakley, but much has also remained the same. The fourteen-thousand-foot granite peaks are still there, as well as the prairie dog-filled grasslands. Dark-billed meadowlarks still sing the sun up every April. Umber-maned bull elks still bugle the full moon down every October. And people everywhere in the West, and elsewhere, still need to be periodically immersed in the comfort of myths—the security of knowing there is a place out there where heroes still live and breath, where fact and fiction are pleasantly blurred, and where all is not hard and cold and all too mortal."

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The Life of Texas Jack—where fact and fiction sometimes mingle by Susan Omohundro

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in Texas Jack's life. Many stories were written about his exploits, and they tended to expand upon his actual accomplishments and even to throw in "facts" we know to be false (such as his "Indian blood").

One such book is *Famous Frontiersmen, Pioneers and Scouts*, by E. G. Cattermole, published 1883 by Coburn and Newman of Chicago; re-published in 1926 by W.



Abbott, Tarrytown, NY. A chapter in this book, published just a few years after Jack's death, purports to describe the "Life of Texas Jack," (pp. 499-508) but anyone familiar with Texas Jack's biography will see that it takes many liberties with pedestrian truth.

The modern reader will find amusement in the florid writing style as well as the subject matter of the following excerpt:

To begin with, Texas Jack's heart was in the right place, from the time his eyes first opened to the light till the day they were closed in death, about three years ago; for we find him brave and courageous, honest and true, mindful of the rights of others, and always ready to lend a helping hand, or champion the defenseless.

How he imbibed the love of adventure to such an extent as to cause him to determine, even when a boy in one of the South Atlantic States, to enter upon the exciting life of the Southwest in Texas, we cannot conceive, though his surroundings at the date of his childhood were well adapted to fit him, as far as horsemanship, hunting, and trapping were concerned, for the new life he was to lead. He often, in those days, assisted in furnishing the family table with game of his own shooting. We find him very early determined to become the owner of large herds of cattle. He had heard of the immense ranches of Texas and their wealthy owners, and intended to use what means he had collected from the results of his sure aim with the rifle, to take him to that country, where he expected to realize the visions of wealth that inspired him to youthful endeavor. He owned a pony with many good points, to which he was much attached, a rifle, revolver, and knife, in the use of which he had become distinguished among his fellows. With these and a few necessary article of clothing and camping utensils suited to the journey, he left his pleasant home and friends.

Imagine him now entertained in hospitable homes, sharing the good cheer within, and again cooking his simple meal over a forest fire, and lying down to sleep beneath the stars, with only his faithful horse to share his solitude. Yet the way was not all smooth. He found himself in the hands of unprincipled men, who were ready to rob him of the money he had hoarded so carefully, and must use so prudently, ere the long journey was accomplished. But Jack, ever on the alert, used his revolver with such good execution that they failed to gain their object, two of their number being killed instantly, and he continued on his way, trusting more and more to the protection of the friendly woods as night came on.

When the Texas border was reached, he found he could be of service to a family as "cow-boy" - a term given to those who follow the herding of cattle in that locality. He realized that with his scanty means the road to affluence must be slow, yet he meant it to be sure. He was a mere boy as yet, but he set himself to work in this capacity with the energy needed to make him thoroughly familiar with his duties, and served so well that the owner of the ranch considered him indispensable to his success. At the same time he was fitting himself to be the future master of a ranch of his own. In addition to this, he was still perfecting his skill in trailing, hunting, and trapping, and from the sale of skins increased the small sum that he received for his work to a considerable amount.

We next hear of him as hunter to one of the government forts. Here was afforded an ample opportunity for the display of his wonderful proficiency as a marksman. It suited well his taste, as, when mounted on a fleet steed, he rode at will over the immense prairies in the healthful excitement of the hunt, excelling all when the results of the chase were counted up. As long as he held the position the soldiers were never in want of venison, buffalo meat, wild turkey, and a great variety of game. Nothing could have better aided the full development of his already fine form than this free, wild life. He was now nearly six feet in height, with an ease of carriage and self-possession of manner that betokened ease of mind. Jack Omohundro was not ashamed of his deeds. His hair fell in dark waves over his shoulders, and gave a softened expression to the firm outlines of a face which showed the strength of character that afterward separated him from the ordinary frontiersman, and gave him a place in history. He wore a buckskin frock, fringed and beaded, and leggings of the same material, tucked into high-topped cavalry boots armed with spurs. The indispensable belt, with weapons of the most approved make, and a gray sombrero, completed his attire.

He now comes to the front as an Indian-fighter. On one of his hunting excursions, while enjoying more than usually the delights of the chase, he was surprised by the appearance of some sixty Indians, and his desire for an opportunity to distinguish himself is satisfied. Being in possession of a repeating rifle, he immediately commenced an attack, instead of making any attempt at flight, as we would have supposed any one man would have done.

When one after another of the savages fell under the fire of the repeating rifle, the others became disconcerted, unaccustomed to such a weapon as they were then, and, though they did not retreat, hesitated to advance too near.

Jack was wounded by the arrows that fell thick and fast about him, and also his horse; but he withstood them a long time, until he saw a larger band of savages about to reinforce the first. Then he concluded to carry the four scalps already obtained from the bodies that had fallen near him, with all possible haste to the fort, as proof of the engagement, before death should rob him of the glory that would be attached to the achievement. Under a shower of arrows from the pursuing band, both his horse and himself suffering from their wounds, they sped swiftly on, and gained the fort and desired distinction.

From this time as long as he remained at the post, he acted as scout and guide, in which field he won new favor; since he counted not his own life dear in the service of humanity, saving many lives at the risk of his own.

Bands of robbers and horse thieves frequented many portions of the Western county, and nowhere were they more plentiful than in Texas at the time of which we write.

Now that Jack had become a scout, he longed in some way to show his appreciation of this recognition of his services, besides being naturally antagonistic to anything like a lawless element.

Being a close observer, he already had suspicions of a locality which might be the hiding-place of a noted band, and as it was near the time when supplies were expected for the fort, and he had on several occasions seen parties about who not only apparently wished to conceal themselves but their intentions, he determined to keep close watch in order to prevent any loss, and, if possible, to surprise and capture the men.

A small town near by was a popular resort for loafers and gamblers, and afforded Jack an excellent opportunity to continue the scrutiny of those whom he suspected. He concluded to play the spy. Entering one of the noted gambling houses, in an off-hand way he stepped up to the bar which invariably accompanies such places, and ordered drinks for the crowd. For any one to drink alone was considered almost an insult to the bystanders.

This opened the way to friendly conversation, which ended in his being invited to "take a hand for luck." This would further his plans by giving him the chance of hearing whatever might throw light on the identity of suspicious individuals. He therefore consented; but luck went against him, since, for purposes of his own, he made no effort to win. He was soon on excellent terms with the set. Jack recognized one among the number as the same person whom he had seen lurking near a bluff on the traveled road to the fort, and who had hastily passed out of sight, seemingly with a view to concealment, when aware of his approach.

That he had the slightest suspicion that it was Texas Jack who surprised him, and who now was engaged

in the friendly game with himself and friends, is not for a moment to be supposed.

The bluff to which we have referred was some distance from the road, and so situated as to afford easy concealment, if desired.

The stranger, for such we will call him till we prove his name and character, was now in very different costume from the previous occasion, yet this was only a confirmation of the truth of Jack's suspicions.

Jack himself had so altered his appearance as to be hardly recognized.

The next day, and the next, he sought opportunity for carrying out his plans by adding to the intimacy already existing between himself and the stranger. Finally, at urgent solicitation, he accompanied him to his home in the mountains, about thirty miles away.

One and then another joined them there, until there were twelve strong, robust men, well armed. It was nearly a week before any of their plans were disclosed. The time was spent in feasting, drinking, and card playing, with an

occasional hunt to relieve the monotony. Cautiously they revealed a plot for obtaining stores, and asked Dave Hunter's assistance, as Jack was now called. The work was planned for the following Friday; it was now Monday.

Jack must have time to warn the soldiers to prepare for an attack, and get back without exciting doubts as to his loyalty. It was a difficult thing to do, as these sharp, fierce men kept strict watch, on account of their short acquaintance.



He must plan some excuse for absence. On plea of hunting to break up the feeling of lassitude that he averred was beginning to possess him, he made preparations for departure, purposely in the absence of the larger number of those who shared the retreat, as less explanation would then be required.

How he sped over the ground when once at liberty! but not in the direction of the fort. He made his way there by a circuitous route, and by ways as little frequented as any.

No time was lost in revealing the plot and getting back to the stronghold of the robbers, except to obtain game with which to satisfy the impression he had given, that hunting was the object of his going. He loaded a fine two-year-old buck, which he had easily taken, upon his horse, sure that this when dressed and served in true mountaineer style would not only gratify their appetites, but dispel their doubts as to his loyalty, if any existed.

They eyed him sharply as he sprang to the ground, and relieved his restless horse from the unaccustomed burden of the deer.

"Where runs the herd from which that buck was taken, hunter?" said one.

"In these mountains, in the small canyon to the west, - fine feed there," replied Jack, or Dave, as he was known there.

"Too fine, I fear, to warrant the finding of much game, my friend," answered another.

"You're right, boys. So scanty have I found game in these parts for the past two days, it's a wonder how you exist."

"Trust me, the government is back of the deer, Dave, and besides, our *friends* often *share* with us; - *sabe*?" said a third.

"Aye, lads, 'It's a poor town that has only one road leading to it.' But I'm as hungry as a gaunt wolf on a desert island. What can you set out?"

Dave followed the three and was soon cheered by a plentiful amount of provisions, no less than drinks of different kinds, for these were not the men to do things by halves.

After partaking freely of the food set before him, cautious in indulging in the tempting beverages, lest they might, from the stupidity they were likely to cause, unfit him for the task he had undertaken, he lay down to rest from the fatigue of the journey. Only two days would intervene before he would be needed in the full strength of his manhood, and Texas Jack would serve his country as never before. But how could this band of lawless men be taken? It would be an easy thing, now that the soldiery were warned, to protect the stores, but these desperadoes were a terror not to be despised. It would need a clear head to plan, and strong arm to execute. Let us leave him to his dreams, while we return to the fort and note the preparations for going out to meet and defend the train coming with supplies. The bustle has already begun. The soldiers are eager to be engaged, weary of the dullness of camp life. Orders to march are given, and soon is heard the tramp, tramp, of the boys in blue. A portion of the command was to proceed to a distance beyond the supposed point of attack, to make sure of success, while the remainder were to be stationed at the bluff, in accordance with Jack's suggestion.

Long before these were on their way, another and a strange cavalcade made its way down the mountain side, and Jack was with it. The direction in which they were moving indicated that the two bodies might meet at some point.

At the head rode the chief in his showy and elegant uniform of velvet and gold with the emblem of his rank, the gold star, on his front. Long and gracefully waving plumes adorned his hat. His followers were

Jack returned to the fort, but shortly after, though the officers were sorry to part with so valuable a scout, he determined to make a beginning toward the stocking of the cattle ranch which had been his ambition. Herds of wild horses roamed the Texan plains, and having found a companion, they started in pursuit. Experts in the use of the lariat, it was not long before quite a large number were herded and driven to the place where he determined to settle. The means he had accumulated enabled him to purchase a ranch and begin a substantial business, and one that proved lucrative. Later he is induced to engage with "The Buffalo Bill Combination," in the capacity of an actor, with what success we are not informed. But frontier life had sufficient attractions to recall him, and we find him again at his ranch. Mining also claimed his attention in Colorado, this State having become celebrated for its gold ore.

The region about Leadville exerted a magnetic influence, and thither Jack was drawn, seeking a competence that would harmonize with the independent spirit within him. Strong, not only in himself but his material resources, he would then be able to gratify at will the promptings he could never silence, to aid his fellows whenever occasion offered. In this he was only moderately successful. His ranch still held the precedence as a substantial dependence. But like a "will-o'-the-wisp" in the distance, he ever beheld the glowing treasures he would possess, and expecting to approach and grasp them, he continued the pursuit for gold. His time was not all occupied in mining. He took as usual a general interest in the affairs of the town, which, mushroom-like, had suddenly grown to astonishing proportions, and in which had congregated a medley of human beings that would afford study for an ethnographer. There was enough to engage one of Jack's temperament far more than his leisure hours. Many a night, as well as day, was spent in searching out the well-laid schemes of treacherous men, and thwarting their designs for robbery and murder, or whatever wickedness might be disclosed. In not a few instances life paid the penalty of their crime.

On the evening stage from the mountains, June 27, 187-, was a jolly trio of men. That their coming would result in mischief was only too evident. Partially intoxicated, they incautiously allowed words to escape that gave Jack, who had come to witness the arrivals with many others, the key to their plans. They knew of the presence in town of a wealthy capitalist having interests in that vicinity, and believing that he would have a considerable amount of ready means about him, they purposed awaiting his departure, with the intention of attacking the stage, and obtaining it. To frustrate their movements, Jack had asked the assistance of two of his friends, and after finding out the time set by the gentleman for his trip to the mine he desired to visit, they made their way to the spot they thought best suited to the object of the desperadoes. They had some time to wait before the rumbling of wheels told the approach of the six-in-hand held by Jake Timberlake. They could hear from their elevated position, a slight rustling below, and suppressed tones. Just as the team turned the sharp point of rocks where both parties were concealed, "Hands up!" rang out upon the air, and the stage was brought to a sudden halt; but only for a moment, ere Texas Jack with his friends, sprang forward. Completely surprised, the robbers could do nothing but submit to the same terms they had exacted; since the same invincible weapons stared them in the face with which they had compelled obedience. The stage-driver and passengers were only too glad to assist in securing the criminals, who were firmly bound and taken to the nearest place to await the demands of justice. Jack and his comrades returned to their labors, not the richer in money - this they would not accept - but happy in the consciousness of another victory won.

Soon after this occurrence he became afflicted with a lung difficulty, which grew more and more serious, and terminated in death.

REUNION

BY JULIE GREENE

[*Julie Greene submitted the following essay on the theme of "reunion," recounting the friendship between Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, and how that famous friendship can affect us even today. – ed.*]

As a great niece of Texas Jack, I am familiar with, and interested in, his life and that of his contemporaries. I keep in touch with other of his relatives, interested historians, museums, historical societies, and collectors of Old West artifacts.

Last summer, therefore, when we were in the northwest, we made it a point to go through Cody, Wyoming, just east of Yellowstone, to visit the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, a western museum of great significance. "I've got someone here I'd like you to meet," the curator said to me after greeting us. "What a coincidence that you both happen to be here at the same time."

"This is Susanne Cody Hills," the curator said as I shook hands with the lady who accompanied her. "She is a close descendant of Buffalo Bill Cody."

What a treat it was to meet my counterpart—a relative of the man my great uncle called his best friend over a century ago. She was very interested in hearing personal things about Jack, as I was interested in hearing about Bill. And we seemed to have a lot in common other than our ancestors. I made a friend that day. I like to think of this then, as "a reunion by proxy" of two men who, 130 years ago, were closer than brothers.



The year was 1872. The most devastating war in America's history, the Civil War, had come to an end, and the United States was in the midst of probably the most interesting, the most exciting period in its short history: the scarcely three decades we now refer to as "The Wild West".

To the average American who lived in the civilized East, the brave men and women who risked their lives, the pioneers who ventured into that wild and dangerous territory were larger-than-life heroes. And to the delight of adults and children alike, their lives and adventures were recorded and embellished upon by writers of pulp fiction, known as dime novelists. By far the most flamboyant and successful of this group was a scalawag by the name of Ned Buntline.

For several years Buntline had fictionalized real heroic adventures of some of the most successful scouts and lawmen on the frontier. His dime novels were tremendously successful in America and Europe. He wrote about the exploits of the rugged and brave men who often virtually lived in their saddles. They faced

danger in the form of hostile Indians, wild animals, unscrupulous outlaws who would shoot them for the meager supplies they carried; all in rugged uncharted terrain, and in all kinds of extreme weather. It was those men who were instrumental in opening the West to the railroad and other trappings of civilization, and paved the way for a stable government.

Thanks to the Dime Novels written by Buntline, who referred to himself as "The Fastest Pen In The West", Buffalo Bill Cody, Texas Jack Omohundro, Wild Bill Hickok and many others became household names to their adoring fans in Chicago, Boston, New York City and all over the eastern seaboard. Recording and sensationalizing the exploits of those men was very lucrative, and Buntline basked in the glow of his literary success.

One day, he had a brilliant idea. He would approach his two most popular Dime Novel characters, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, to star in a real stage play (written and directed by him, of course), which they would perform in eastern theaters. They would bring their own company of Indians and horses. It would take the city folks by storm! What a fabulous inspiration! Buntline proudly congratulated himself, and soon was heading west.

When he arrived in North Platte Nebraska where Bill and Jack were serving as U.S. Government Scouts at Fort McPherson, he presented his idea to the two men, who at first laughed in his face. But Buntline convinced them that they would only have to be away for a couple of months, and it would be fun. "Besides," he told them, "they could make a lot of money. Obviously they just weren't fully aware of their own fame and popularity. They'd knock 'em dead!" Most likely it was the thought of the financial rewards that finally enticed the two scouts, as they agreed to meet Buntline in Chicago and to give it a go.

And so, a couple of months later Jack and Bill traveled east to the Windy City where they had agreed to meet with Ned Buntline. But when they arrived, they were dismayed to find Buntline drunk in his hotel room. And he hadn't written a word. He had booked the theater and arranged for 12 Pawnees to play the part of the Indians, however, so they were obligated to go through with the venture.

The two scouts sobered him up, and together the three of them tried to come up with a workable plan. They figured they would just have to do their best, as it was Thursday and the play was to open the next Monday. Buntline stayed up all night writing a script and they spent the weekend rehearsing their lines.

The play, "Scouts of the Prairie", opened to a packed house. With such a short time to rehearse, a sizable lack of talent and an unfamiliar bout of stage fright, the two stars went on stage where they were surrounded by total chaos - a confused state of whooping Indians and frightened horses - all to the enthusiastic cheers of an adoring audience. They rescued the fair damsel from the villain (played by Ned Buntline) just before her dastardly demise, and fired the blanks in their guns at the "Redskins" who fell on cue.

But when it came time to recite their lines, they had forgotten most of what they were supposed to say. It was a total disaster. Finally, Bill and Jack fell into ad libbing, chatting with each other as they had done so many times around a campfire. And soon they actually began to forget the audience and enjoy themselves. The press, the next day was not kind. Critics said that the play was a hideous display of unprofessionalism. In a word, it was patently awful.

The audiences, on the other hand, were wildly enthusiastic. They loved it. Most of them had never even seen an Indian, and their adoration for the two stars rivaled that displayed for today's rock stars.

Well, as time went on, the show improved dramatically. Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill became comfortable in their roles, and they performed in most of the major cities to sell-out crowds. And the two stars (and their promoter) enjoyed greater and greater fame and new-found fortune.



They even talked Wild Bill Hickok into joining them one year, but that didn't work out. Among other things, Bill would take great delight in shooting blanks at the Indians and horses from close proximity, causing them to howl in pain. He was, to put it mildly, a loose cannon. They soon began to realize that he wasn't cut out for show business, and he left to go back west where his talents were appreciated.

For the next few years, Texas Jack Omohundro and Buffalo Bill Cody fell into spending part of each year on the eastern stage, but they always returned to that place where they had left their hearts, the great American West. Among their many other exploits, as U.S. Government Scouts, Jack accompanied the Pawnees on their summer hunts, and both he and Bill worked for a while as hunting guide for foreign dignitaries – guests of the U.S. Government.

Sadly, at age 33 and at the height of his theatrical career, Jack died. Buffalo Bill, until his death in 1917, went on to entertain the public through his very popular "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" Show, which, in order to accommodate the crowds, began to take place in arenas, in which such luminaries as Annie Oakley gained extraordinary fame for her marksmanship.

And with that great success, the original stage shows performed by Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill were generally forgotten except to Wild West enthusiasts and historians.

WHAT IF CUSTER HAD SURVIVED LITTLE BIG HORN?

Book Review:

The Court-Martial of George Armstrong Custer

by Douglas C. Jones

NY Scribners, 1976

By John Omohundro

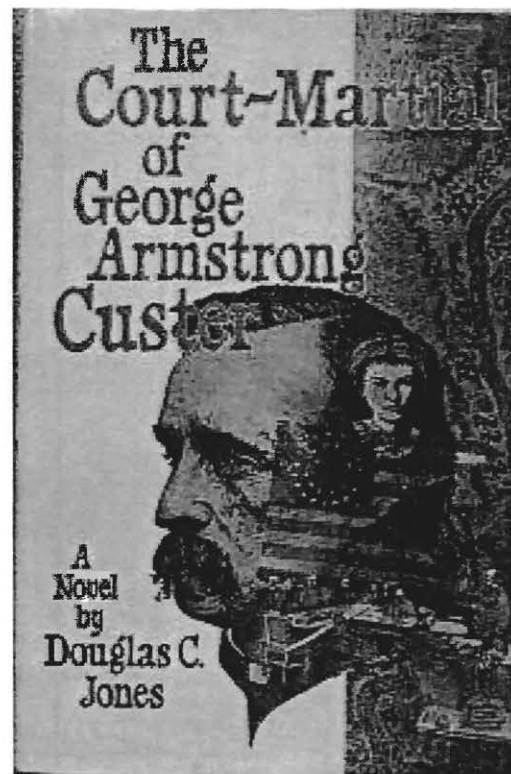
This is a novel of historical fiction, which supposes that General Custer did not die at the battle of Little Big Horn, and was brought to trial for disobeying orders. The author is recognized as a master of historical fiction, and is also the author of *Search for Temperance Moon*, *Barefoot Brigade*, *Winding Stair*, and thirteen other historical novels.

I don't care for trial novels, but was interested in the character of Custer; my beginning reading of history of plains revealed he was a flamboyant, uncontrollable character and that the Little Big Horn may have been due to his errors. What does examination of the evidence indicate? That's what this book attempts to uncover.

Custer's actions and character emerge vividly through the courtroom proceedings. Wisely, the author has kept Custer himself quiet in the novel except when he is called to testify. The author is not omniscient; we see the events only from the lawyers'—and briefly, General Sherman's—points of view. On the other hand, Elizabeth Custer looms large. Custer's relationship to his wife is extremely close and important to the plot, but frankly, quite strange.

I had expected something a tad corny but found the writing, characters, and courtroom action to be gripping. By the end you have had an in-depth look at the evidence for the tragedy and can decide for yourself who is culpable of what. The outcome is, I think, most reasonable.

The battle of Little Big Horn was in June of 1876, the same year that J.B. "Wild Bill" Hickok died. Our own Texas Jack was sent by the *New York Herald* as a dispatch carrier and reporter, to accompany the Cavalry and Army units on



The Court-Martial of George Armstrong Custer supposes that Custer survived the Battle of Little Big Horn and was subsequently put on trial

the march. Jack sent a dispatch that was published in the *Herald* in September on the Indian wars (*Buckskin and Satin* p. 142).

Trial judge advocate Major Asa B. Gardner is the Chief Prosecutor, under instructions from Phil Sheridan and William Tecumseh Sherman, at the behest of President Grant. He is 37, single, principled, disciplined, and determined.

The defense lawyer is Allan Jacobson, a cigar-chewing grandfather and civilian from Monroe Michigan, from a firm whose senior partner is Elizabeth Custer's father. His character is reminiscent of the earthy but brilliant Spencer Tracy/Clarence Darrow lawyer from *Inherit the Wind*.

The author, a retired military officer, was born and lives in Arkansas.

**WE NEED YOUR INPUT!
IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY RETURNED
YOUR
MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE, PLEASE
RETURN IT SOON. YOUR
RESPONSES WILL HELP US BETTER
SERVE YOUR INTERESTS.**



TEXAS JACK TO APPEAR IN NEW MOVIE HIDALGO

By C. Rand McKinney

[After being alerted to the upcoming movie "Hidalgo" by alert member Diane Ford (see The Mail Bag), I pieced together some more information from the Internet. Since the film is not yet released, some of the details are still unconfirmed. -ed]

Texas Jack Omohundro will appear as a character in a new movie from Disney Studios called *Hidalgo* that is in production now. Set in 1890, *Hidalgo* tells the true story of Frank T. Hopkins, a part-Lakota Sioux cavalry scout from South Dakota who was a world-famous endurance horseman.



Frank Collison as Horace Bing in "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman." Collison will portray Texas Jack in the upcoming movie Hidalgo.

Hopkins developed his endurance-riding ability as a dispatch rider in the US Army, and his horse-handling skill in Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows. In all, Hopkins won more than four hundred races in the late 1800's, when endurance riding was the rage.

In the movie, a Middle Eastern sheik (portrayed by Omar Sharif) invites Hopkins and his quick mustang paint, Hidalgo, to run in the 3,000-mile, centuries old "Ocean of Fire" race across the Arabian Desert.

Since Texas Jack died in 1880, it's not clear whether his role in the film will be purely fictional or whether there will be some historical basis for his role, through the connection with Buffalo Bill's shows. Also, the character's name was originally listed as Texas Jack "Olmohundro," though that unfortunate mistake appears to have been corrected.

Scenes for the movie were filmed in South Dakota, California, and Morocco. Although originally slated for US release in August, the film's opening date has apparently been delayed until October.

Actor Frank Collison will portray Texas Jack, and Viggo Mortensen (who played Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*) will portray Hopkins. Collison is best known to television audiences as Horace Bing, the bumbling telegraph operator, on the CBS series "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman." Those of you familiar with Texas Jack might complain that Collison bears little resemblance to John B. Omohundro. That objection notwith-

standing, we can at least take heart that the name "Texas Jack" is appearing on playbills and marquees once again.

Frank Collison comes from a theatre background, and is a founding member of the Pacific Resident Theatre Ensemble, which is a winner of the L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award for Continuous Achievement. He starred in the group's productions of "The Beggar's Opera" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

He trained at the American Conservatory Theatre, earned his BA in theatre at San Francisco State University and MFA in acting at UC San Diego. Appearing in over 150 productions, Collison has worked off-Broadway and in regional theatres in Boston, Denver and California. He resides in Los Angeles with his wife and three children and remains active in theatre while pursuing a film career.



Although undoubtedly dramatized for film, the movie is based on a very real historical event: Hopkins' 1890 winning of the famous Aden-to-Gaza endurance race. Beginning in Aden, in present-day Yemen, the course followed the Persian Gulf and then turned inland over the barren desert along the borders of Arabia, Iraq, and Syria.

One-time Pony Express rider Frank T. Hopkins (Viggo Mortensen, center) experiences the adventure of a lifetime as he and his Mustang, Hidalgo, compete against the world's finest Arabian stallions in the greatest endurance race ever run: the Ocean of Fire - 3,000 miles across the desert - in Walt Disney Pictures' epic adventure, "Hidalgo." Photo: Richard Cartwright. Source: www.romanticmovies.com

The contest had been held annually for a thousand years, and had always been won by an Arab horse. In the words of Anthony A. Amaral (author of *Mustang: Life and Legends of Nevada's Wild Horses*):

"Slightly over one hundred horses started on the ride from Aden. The great caravan of skilled Arabian riders rode their most prized mounts. They were spirited, accustomed to the difficulty of the sands, accustomed to the sun that sprayed exhausting heat upon them. Even among the mass of mounted horsemen, Hopkins stood out with parti-colored, 950 pound Hidalgo from the American plains.

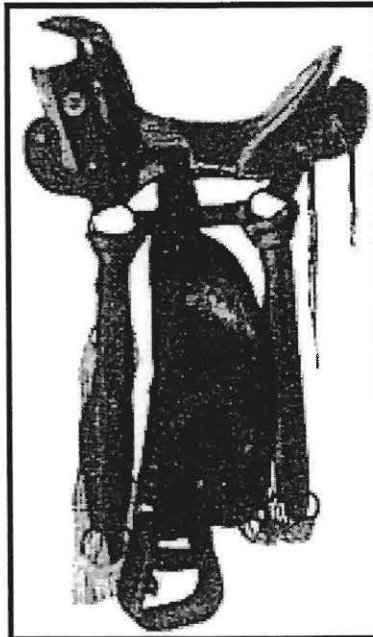
Hopkins held Hidalgo at a steady pace as they made their way through the dry heat and over sandy soil. The march progressed to the Persian Gulf and up toward Syria and then along the border of Iraq and Arabia. Each day the riders started with the sun, following it until they

were marching into it. Horses dropped by the way, some exhausted, some lame. At the end of the first week, the scarcity of water and the meager diet the horses were forced to exist upon in the barren country had culled the inadequate horses. The strung line of riders dwindled daily.

Entering the second week of the grueling trek, Hopkins made his move and started to pass the other desert riders. In the wake of the sand kicked up by Hidalgo, treasured Arabian horses of the Bedouins fell farther and farther behind, while Hidalgo kept to a steady pace.

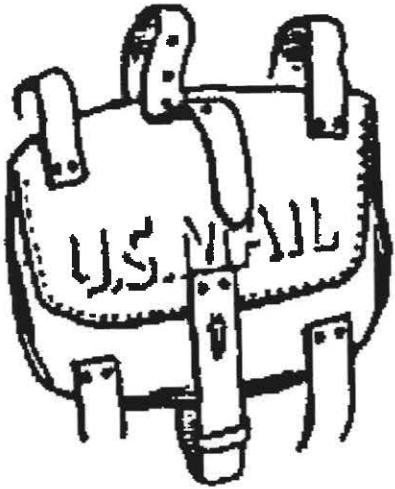
On the sixty-eighth day of the ride Hopkins rode Hidalgo to the finish stone, leaving behind him three thousand scorching miles.

The tough Paint Mustang was the winner by thirty-three hours over his nearest competitor. The only American Paint Horse in the history of Arabian endurance racing ever to win the historic race, Hidalgo did it, and did it on merit.”



From the Mail Pouch. . . .

[John Omohundro, director of the TJA, wrote the following letter to bestselling author Tom Wolfe, and received a reply from the author, a native of Richmond, Virginia. Mr. Wolfe is best known for novels such as "The Bonfire of the Vanities", "The Right Stuff", and "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test." —ed.]



Dear Mr. Wolfe,

I write on behalf of the Texas Jack Assn, members of which have read with interest your *A Man in Full*, and noticed on page 231 that Charlie observes himself in the mirror to be sitting in "an Omohundro easy chair."

We'd like to track down which of our ancestors was in the furniture line (all Omohundro are kin, descending from Richard O., who arrived in Virginia in the 1640s). Can you tell us anything about the

easy chair: is it an Atlanta product? 19th or 20th century design? Is there someone in Atlanta who can help us pursue our query?

We'd be grateful for any help you can provide. I enclose a recent issue of our *Scout* Publication, honoring one of the more flamboyant Omohundros. Wouldn't Texas Jack make a nice Tom Wolfe novel?!

John Omohundro
Director, Texas Jack Association

Dear Mr. Omohundro,

As a matter of fact, I have two Omohundro easy chairs here at home in New York. Mine are small, as easy chairs go, but they are the most comfortable chairs in the house. They came from Richmond, Virginia, via an interior decorator I know there. I'll ask her if she knows the provenance. Omohundro was a familiar name to me when I was growing up in Richmond. Seems to me I knew a boy named Omohundro at Ginter Park grade school.

And yes, Texas Jack sounds like a fabulous subject for a book, non-fiction or fiction. You might alert Larry McMurtry, the master in that area.

With best wishes for happy hunting on the plains of genealogy,
Tom Wolfe

The following is an email submitted via email to the omohundros.com web site:

Texas Jack will be portrayed by actor Frank Collison in a movie called Hidalgo which is due to be released in August 2003. The film is based on an actual event: a long-distance horse race in the late 1800s. An American rider, Frank Hopkins, played by Viggo Mortensen in the movie, traveled to the Middle East with his horse, Hidalgo, to take part in the famous race. Before participating in this endurance race, Hopkins had been performing in Wild West shows, as did Texas Jack and friends Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok. Visit the Internet Movie Database website at www.imdb.com for updates and additional information.

Diane Ford

[See the article in this issue for more information on "Hidalgo" -ed.]

Sad News

New member Diane Ford reports the following tragic news:

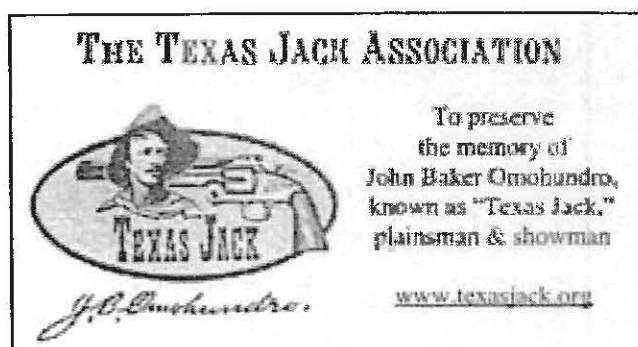
My sister Linda (Ford) lost her husband and two small children in a horrible house fire early Monday morning (Jan. 27) . This was the old log house in Virginia which had been owned by our grandparents (the Potters) and then was out of the family for many years until Linda purchased it just last year. She was so excited about raising her kids in the area where so many of our maternal ancestors came from.

Linda was still in Houston at the time, working as a paralegal, waiting for her husband to get his new job lined up, at which time she planned to leave Texas for good and become a Virginian.

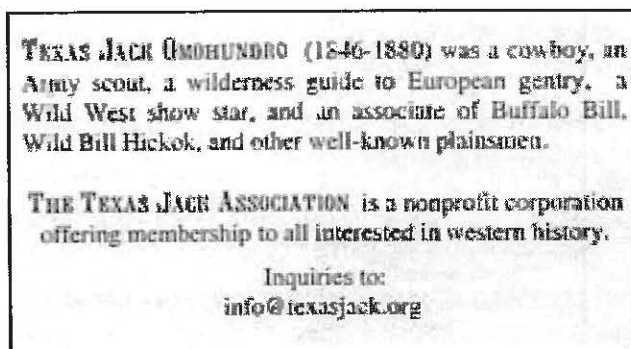
GET THE WORD OUT!

As discussed at the 2002 Deadwood Roundup, the Executive Committee has produced TJA "business" cards. These wallet-sized cards will have a brief description of Texas Jack and the Association, as well as contact information for the Association to be distributed to people who express an interest in Texas Jack. Cards will be forwarded to members when they pay their annual dues in lieu of a membership card.

When people ask, "What the heck is the TJA??" give them one of your contact cards.



front



back

If you wish to receive more, contact Edna Nees at AndeSeen@aol.com





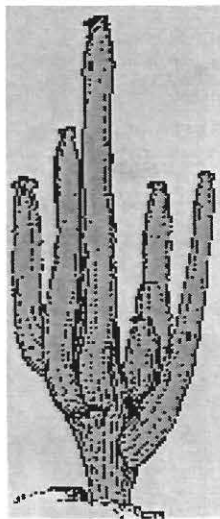
by Julie Omohundro

For the past couple of months, I've been in my usual post-holiday/pre-taxday slump, exacerbated this year by the ice storms and power outages that El Nino inevitably brings to my area of the country. In other words, I haven't achieved any great TJA landmarks since writing the President's Report for the January *Scout*. Still, I and the other Board members have not been in hibernation for the winter:

- A membership survey awaits a few finishing touches. With a little luck, it will be distributed before the end of March.
- Updated bylaws are still in the draft phase. With a little more luck, they will be circulated to Board members for initial comments soon.
- We have located an attorney who specializes in non-profit law. The Board is now reviewing her preliminary opinion on the options available to TJA regarding incorporation, tax-exemption, and liability risks.
- We have established a teleconference account with AT&T so that Board members can "meet" to discuss TJA issues more often.

I expect to have much more activity to report to you in the next *Scout*. El Nino is fading, spring is on its way, and my taxes are nearly done...

Julie Omohundro
President
president@texasjack.org



LETTER-WRITING CAMPAIGN CONTINUES for TJ POSTAL STAMP

The Association would like to see Texas Jack honored on a postage stamp. Remember to write a short letter to the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee each time you receive the Scout stating why the US Postal Service should produce a stamp with Texas Jack's image and name. Send your letters to:

Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Room 4474E
Washington, DC 20260-2437
Attn: James C. Tolbert, Jr.

below is a sample letter written by Dennis Greene in November 1997

Dear Mr. Tolbert:

Hundreds, maybe even thousands of stamps are produced yearly! What a great tribute it would be to honor one of the most deserving historical figures of the 19th Century....John B. (Texas Jack) Omohundro! Although his life was comparatively short, he achieved fame in his own day for those attributes which we all agree helped to make America the great country it is. His lifetime encompassed the Civil War, and the subsequent opening of the great American West.

Surely, with all the stamps available to be dedicated, there would be a place for such a man.
<*Dennis continues with the fact that a stamp has already been designed.*>

I hope your committee will consider the merits of honoring this man on the face of an American stamp.

A website has been created for Texas Jack. Won't you take a few minutes to peruse it? I know you will find it most interesting, as have many others judging from the feedback being received. It tells his story and has many graphics. You can find it at: www.texasjack.org.

Thank you very much for giving this your valuable attention.

Sincerely,

The Texas Jack Scout
Edna Nees
213 Coles Rolling Road
Scottsville, VA 24590

TO: