



Volume XXXVIII no. 2

[www.texasjack.org](http://www.texasjack.org)

July 2023



## Roundup Recap

By Matthew Kerns



*Rick, Terry, Rob, Grace, Nancy Omohundro, Rind McKinney, Larry Toye, Matt Kerns, Linda Omohundro, Jaime Kerns, Candice McKinney, Beryl Cuterson*

What a week! During the third week of June, members of the Texas Jack Association met in Naperville, Illinois, for the long-awaited and twice-delayed Roundup! Out of an abundance of caution during the height of the pandemic, the gathering was delayed for two straight years, but this year, with hazy smoke from Canadian wildfires replacing COVID as the primary threat to our respiratory health, we came from across the country to share our appreciation for John B. Omohundro and his legacy.

For me personally, this was the first chance I've had since

I reached out to the Association while I was researching my book to actually meet any of you face to face. And what a great pleasure it was. I've emailed with many of you, some of you are my "Facebook friends," but sitting down to share a meal, a story, and a laugh with all of you really made me (and Jaime) feel incredibly welcome.

*Continued on page 3*

# The Texas Jack Scout

from the Editor's Desk...



Greetings, Texas Jack Association!

What a great time we had at the Chicago Roundup. The camaraderie, the shared tales, and the rich historical insights made it an unforgettable event. I'm thankful for the warm welcome, and look forward to the next one! In this issue of *The Scout*, we have comprehensive recaps from myself and incoming TJA President, Rob, whose keen intellect & enthusiasm promise a vibrant future for our association.

For those who missed the Roundup, we've also included the minutes from the TJA Business meeting. Our commitment to transparency and democracy shines through in these detailed notes. A special thanks to Larry Tyree, whose remarkable leadership in unprecedented times has been a credit to our organization.

A personal highlight post-Roundup was receiving the Spur Award from the WWA for my Texas Jack cover story for *Wild West Magazine*. It's an honor to contribute to the TJA's mission of bringing Texas Jack's story to life.

In this issue, we celebrate the extraordinary achievements of our members. Leadville historian Janice Fox was selected as Grand Marshal for the Leadville Boom Days parade, an event bound to inspire and entertain. We're excited to share a recently digitized photograph from the Lincoln County Historical Museum. This striking image, showing Texas Jack with the Earl of Dunraven at Fort McPherson, offers fascinating insights into Jack's life and relationships.

Don't miss John Omohundro's riveting narrative on the bank panic of 1873. His detailed research takes us back to that tumultuous period, providing a fresh understanding of Jack's era.

A century ago, Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill ended their first tour, transitioning from frontier scouts to stars. They returned to Nebraska, planning their next stage tour with Wild Bill Hickok. But not before Jack rendezvoused with a certain "peerless" ballerina. A century later, the ripple effects of that eventful summer continue to unfold in literature, film, TV, and within the pages of *"The Scout."*

Enjoy this dive into the past, and happy reading!

*Matthew Kerns*, Guest Editor

*The Texas Jack Scout*

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Salt Lick, KY 40371

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.

## Officers

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The Knight of Glin, Co. Limerick, Ireland

Great-grandson of the Earl of Dunraven IV

Mr. Herschel C. Logan, Santa Ana, CA

Author of *Buckskin and Satin*

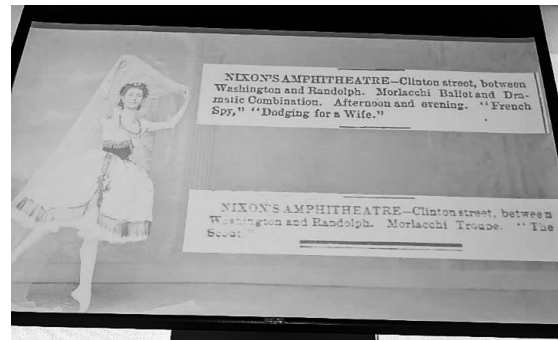
Mrs. Nellie Snyder Yost, North Platte, NE

Historian of the Plains

## *The Texas Jack Scout*

We braved the Windy City of Chicago to check out the Field Museum, to stop at the site of Nixon's Amphitheater, where Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill made their big premieres as stage stars just over 150 years ago, and visited the wonderful Chicago History Museum. We trucked over to LeClaire, Iowa, to see the Buffalo Bill Museum (where we were happy to be greeted by Buffalo Bill himself) and the nearby Cody Homestead, joined by BB Museum director Bob Schiffke, who shared his extensive knowledge of both LeClaire and its most famous son.

On Saturday, we had a business meeting early, followed by a lunch where I talked about Texas Jack's wonderful wife the Peerless Giuseppina Morlacchi. As we sat with the whole group that evening at the Santo Cielo Restaurant, I found myself wishing we had more time to spend together and already looking ahead to the next Roundup. I left with new friends, pictures, memories, and a very special brick that is now proudly displayed in my home office.



*Two of the photos in my presentation. The one on the left was animated to show them looking at each other. On the right, notice the theater she played in.*

Jaime and I would like to thank Larry & Rene, Rick & Nancy, Terry, Linda, Rand & Candice, Rob & Grace, Beryl, and Henry for making this week such a great one. See you at the next Roundup!

## **TJA Chicago Roundup** – a quick recap from Robert Omohundro

The accommodations at the Indigo Hotel in Naperville (a suburb of Chicago) were very nice and clean. The Roundup of 14 started with a Meet-n-Greet. This a great traditional kick-off in having a spot set out to shake hands, trade hugs, and express the "how are you!" To meet up with old friends and, in some cases, to finally meet in person some people that I had only met over the phone or on Zoom.

The weather was perfectly pleasant the entire week! Six of us walked downtown to a fun outdoor dinner at "Fat Rosie's," A Mexican restaurant named after the founder's loyal donkey. The manager took great care of us.

## The Texas Jack Scout



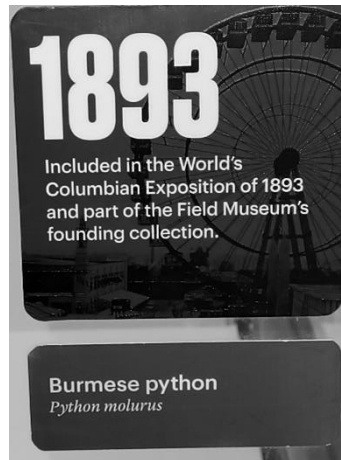
*Postcard Fat Rosie's made for us*



*Meet-n-Greet in lobby of Indigo Hotel.  
Rick, Nancy, Terry, Rand, Candice, Linda,  
Rene, Larry, Beryl, Grace, Rob*

The next day in Chicago, we toured the Field Museum of natural history. It was huge. More interesting exhibits than one could see in multiple

days. It was noteworthy that some of the exhibits had markers denoting them having been on display at the 1893 Exhibition.



A poster for the World's Fair displayed at the Field Museum.

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Candice found two Totem Poles near the Field Museum that she had a connection to.





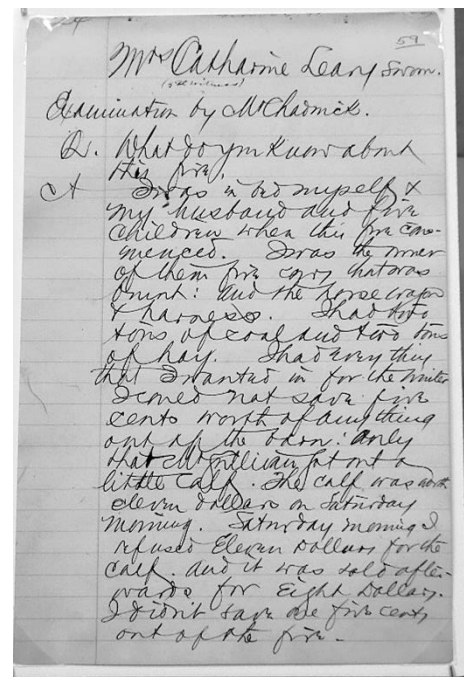
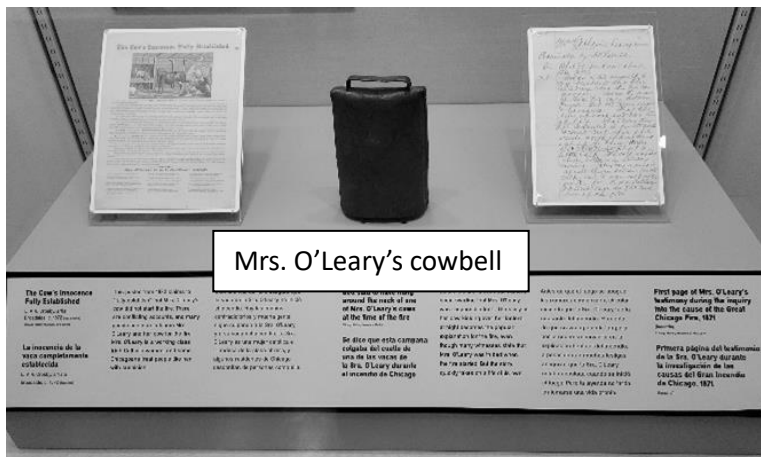
## The Texas Jack Scout



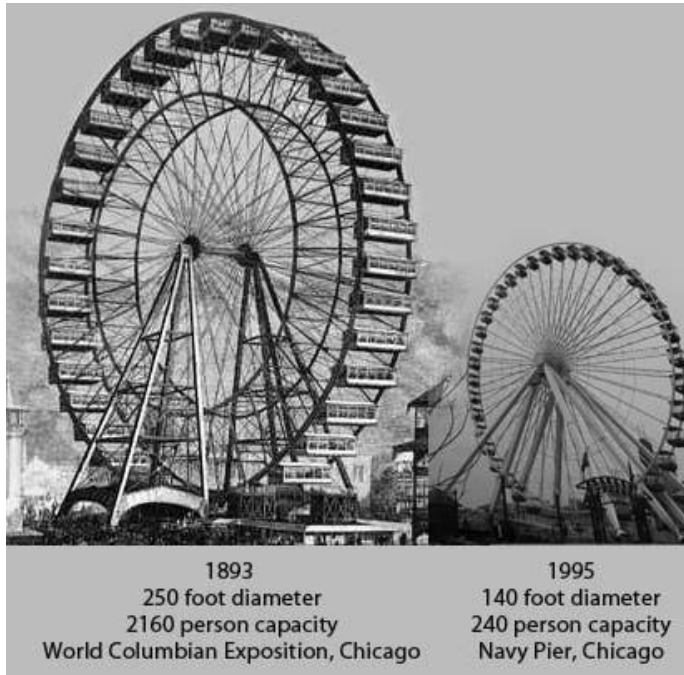
We had a great lunch at Lou Malnati's World-Famous Pizzeria. The real Chicago deep-dish pizza is as good as its reputation. The golden crust is flaky and baked through, not soggy even in the center of the pie! and then drove past the intersection of W. Randolph and N. Clinton Street. The Knight Building

stands on the site of Nixon's Amphitheater, where Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill and Ned Buntline first took the stage.

The afternoon stop at the Chicago History Museum for this twelve-some had the unparalleled anywhere showcase of the great Chicago fire. Photos, exhibits of fire-formed china and silverware, and a court scribe's transcription of testimony from the O'Leary's regarding their fabled barn. We also saw a photo of the colossal Ferris wheel at the 1893 World's Fair and a poster for Cody's show at the fair. Below are exhibits at the Chicago History Museum.



## The Texas Jack Scout



The Buffalo Bill Museum in Le Claire, Iowa, had lots to see with a photo and model of Bill's childhood home, and photos of hunting expeditions led by Bill in 1892 and 1903. They also had a sectioned display case for his scout friend, Texas Jack. It had a hefty binder of present and previous issues of the *Scout* that, we were enthusiastically told, is passed around the entire staff before being placed into the display binder. A

*Larry is pointing to the location of Nixon's Amphitheater where Texas Jack played two years after the Chicago fire shown as dark on the map*



*Buffalo Bill tells about the home he was born in.*

*Robert Schiffke describes button making from shells in the Mississippi River.*

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modern recreationist/actor of Buffalo Bill was on hand to share stories and to pose by his "horse" a three-wheeler hot-rod. √



## The Texas Jack Scout



*The Texas Jack display including the binder of The Texas Jack Scout.*



Then Robert Schiffke, director of the Buffalo Bill Museum, rode with our bus out to the Cody Homestead. He shared stories about the town along the way. The homestead was interesting in that for me this was the first time being in an actual stone walled home from the 1840s with existing furniture and belongings. It did not have the feel of a museum but of the homestead it was. A time capsule of sorts. I was surprised how the staircases built into the stone walls on both sides were still so sturdy despite being well-worn. It seems like every other location related to Bill's or Jack's life has been razed or burnt down.

*<Mr. Schiffke and Matt behind the Cody Home*

## The Texas Jack Scout



*Rick and Terry investigating the Cody Home*



*Interiors of the Cody Home*

The TJA board meeting went well with good discussion and proposals. Matthew's presentation was entertaining as well as informative. He always weaves a great narrative! He recounted with slides showing the newspaper report about the arrival the previous day of Col. E. Z. Judson (Ned Buntline), T. Cody, and J. R. Omerohunder. The paper advertised the first show at Nixon's being a temperance lecture to be given by Col. Judson.



## *The Texas Jack Scout*



The Roundup officially ended with a fine dinner at the Santo Cielo restaurant connected to our hotel. It was a late night long table of great visiting and stories with family. A good time was had by all.



*Nancy, Rick Omohundro, Henry Kucharzyk, Grace, Rob Omohundro, Jaime, Matt Kerns, Linda Omohundro, Beryl Caterson, Terry Omohundro, Larry Tyree, Rand, Candice McKinney. Not pictured Rene Tyree.*

## Chattanooga Author Matthew Kerns Accepts Literary Prize

Saturday, April 22, 2023



### Matthew Kerns

Matthew Kerns, a Chattanooga area historian and author, has been honored with the Western Heritage Award for Outstanding Magazine Article for his article, "Texas Jack Takes an Encore," in *Wild West Magazine*. The literary prize was presented at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, where Mr. Kerns was surrounded by a host of celebrities from the entertainment industry. The awards ceremony was a star-studded event, with many notable personalities from the world of film, music, and literature in attendance. Some of the other honorees included renowned actor Lou Diamond Phillips, musicians Red Steagall and Michael Martin Murphey, director Walter Hill, and beer magnate Pete Coors. The event was emceed by Lakota actor Mo Brings Plenty, who kept the audience entertained throughout the night.

### NEXT SCOUT ISSUE INFORMATION

The deadline for the November 2023 issue of *The Scout* is November 1, 2023.

Please send ideas and materials to our Guest Editor:

**Larry Tyree**

**Ltyree5353@gmail.com**

Thank you, Larry!

## **Texas Jack at Fort McPherson**

**By Matthew Kerns**

**[dimelibrary.com/post/texas-jack-at-fort-mcpherson](http://dimelibrary.com/post/texas-jack-at-fort-mcpherson)**

This photograph, taken sometime in November of 1872, is the only known image of Texas Jack with his friends the Earl of Dunraven and Doctor George Kingsley. It is also the only known image of Texas Jack, America's first famous cowboy, on horseback. The image is part of a larger collection of images taken at Fort McPherson, Nebraska, where Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill both worked as scouts between 1869 and 1872, when they left to launch their new careers as stage stars.



*October 1872 photograph of Texas Jack (right on horse) with the Earl of Dunraven and Dr. Charles Kingsley at Fort McPherson. Photograph Courtesy of the Lincoln County Historical Museum, North Platte, Nebraska.*

The image is important because it verifies a few things I have suspected, but couldn't verify. The first, and perhaps most interesting, is that Jack is wearing the same outfit he used on stage during the "Scouts of the Prairie" tour, and the same one he is wearing in the earliest extant cast picture with Buffalo Bill, Giuseppina Morlacchi, and Ned Buntline. This means that from the start, Omohundro and Cody were doing their best to represent themselves as close to their real-life personas as possible.

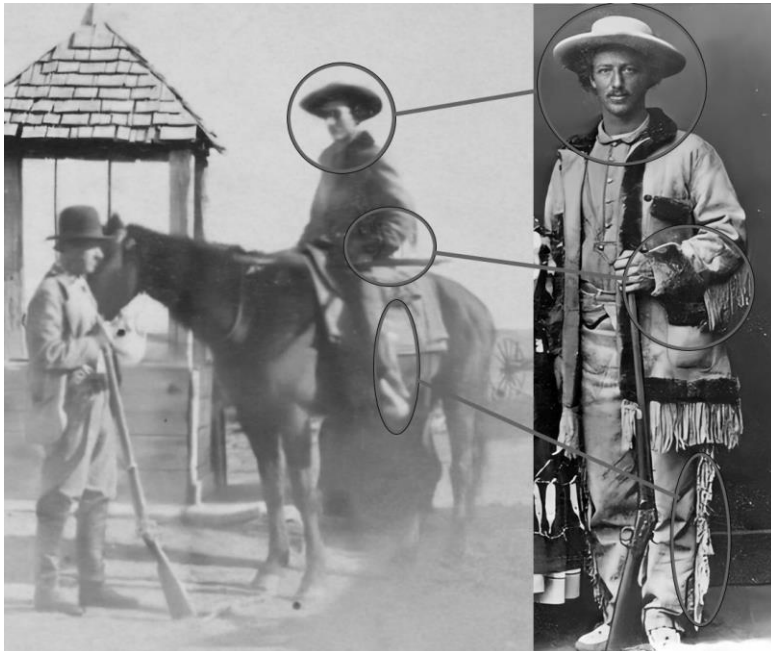


## The Texas Jack Scout



*Restoration of above photo, done to remove scratches and blemishes.*

The image was preserved and digitized by, and is shared here with the permission of, the Lincoln County Historical Museum in North Platte, Nebraska, the town that Texas Jack called home, where he met Bill Cody, where he courted southern belle Ena Palmer, and where he worked as a bartender at Lew Baker's saloon when scouting work was scarce.



Points of commonality: Jack's hat, haircut, and the fur collar on his jacket. The fur around the sleeves and buckskin fringe. Buckskin fringe along the length of the pant.

I love a good museum.



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The West is full of great museums. Cody, Wyoming's Center of the West, which is really five superb museums and a research library all under one roof, is one of my favorite places to experience and learn about the history and legacy of the American West. The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City has art, artifacts, and history that explore the many facets of Western history before, during, and after the height of the golden age of the American cowboy. And the Autry Museum in Los Angeles showcases the pop culture version of the West, from silent movies to talkies on the silver screen, highlighting the ways that the story of the American West became America's mythology.

But sometimes the real treasures aren't just in the great museums, they're in the really good ones. Take the Lincoln County Historical Museum in North Platte, Nebraska. Across the street from the Wild West Arena and just around the corner from Buffalo Bill's "Scout's Rest" Ranch, the Lincoln County Historical Museum is an unassuming building set back from the road, which in this case is North Buffalo Bill Ave.



My wife and I stopped by on the way home from the Western Writers of America conference in Rapid City, South Dakota. We headed south through the Pine Ridge Reservation, stopping to pay our respects at Wounded Knee and stunned by the landscape of Nebraska's sand hills. We walked into the museum on a warm Sunday afternoon and were greeted by museum volunteers Kathy and Doug Wentz.

I've visited countless museums, large and small, and seldom have I had a better experience interacting with volunteers. Kathy and Doug were quick to offer a warm greeting and pointed out a few "must-see" things in the museum. I was singularly focused on checking out the portion of the museum dedicated to the history of Fort McPherson, but found myself particularly drawn to two other sections. The first is an exhibit detailing the history of the Service Men's Canteen in the Union Pacific Railroad station at North Platte. Situated

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alongside the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, the North Platte Canteen stood as a beacon of refreshment and hospitality for soldiers passing through the area during their brief ten- to fifteen-minute stopovers. Throughout its operation, nearly 55,000 dedicated Nebraska women selflessly served nearly seven million soldiers, offering sustenance and care as they embarked on their journeys to fight in World War II.



*Women at the North Platte Canteen feeding a serviceman bound for WWII.*

The second exhibit that really blew me away was newly launched in May, and shares the stories and experiences of the Japanese immigrants that established roots in Lincoln County during and after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. The fact that this museum was able to pull together the contextual information, the images, and the artifacts that they're using to tell the story of the generations of Japanese and Japanese-American men and women who have lived and worked in and around North Platte over the last 120 years is a testament to the dedication and the work that this museum and its staff and volunteers have put into showcasing the interesting history of the area.

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The section on Fort McPherson was great, and really shed some light on the place where Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill worked and sometimes lived while they were in frontier Nebraska. I had seen images and a drawing of the buildings at the fort before, but the photos and artifacts at the museum really helped bring the place to life. The image I am sharing above was blown up and mounted as part of the exhibit, noting the time that Dunraven and Kingsley came to the area to hunt bison, elk, and deer in the Autumn of 1872. The Fort McPherson experience continued as my wife and I walked out the back door of the museum and saw the row of buildings that stretched out ahead of us.

On the right, preserved just as it had been in the days when Fort McPherson at Cottonwood Spring was bustling with soldiers and scouts alike, was the old HQ building. Walking inside, I could imagine Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill sitting at a chair and talking to General Phil Sheridan about the elk hunt they had just been on, or to Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer about where they were going to take Grand Duke Alexis to hunt buffalo. Across the path stands a period log home that once saw visitors stop for water as they crossed Nebraska on the Oregon Trail and another home that was ordered from Sears, shipped to North Platte, and assembled on site.





## *The Texas Jack Scout*



## *The Texas Jack Scout*



A mulberry tree near the end of the lane was full of ripe berries, and birds chirped as they feasted. I was reminded of something that came up when I was researching Texas Jack and the period of his life he spent in North Platte. Dr. George Kingsley wrote in a letter home to his wife while hunting with Dunraven and Texas Jack that "Jack raves poetically as we canter along side by side, and on one of us remarking what a deal of beauty there is in the most plain prairie, he bursts out, 'Ah! You should see it in the spring-time, with the antelopes feeding in one direction, the buffaloes in another, and the little birdies boo-hooing around, building their nesties, and raising hell generally!'"

Listening to the birds and enjoying the scattered flowers and the ripe mulberry, I couldn't help but think back to the Kurt Vonnegut line, "I urge you to please notice when you are happy, and exclaim or murmur or think at some point, If this isn't nice, I don't know what is." We're so incredibly lucky that museums like the Lincoln County Historical Museum in North Platte exist to preserve the history of a place and the people that lived there. It's worth noting our appreciation for people like museum curator Jim Griffin and volunteers like Kathy and Doug Wentz, all helping to share the stories of those that were here before us, from dashing cowboys hunting bison with Pawnee braves to Japanese farmers desperate to start a new and better life, from the soldiers and scouts of Fort McPherson to the women and men in the North Platte Canteen.

North Platte and Lincoln County are lucky to have such a wonderful resource, and I'm pleased beyond words to find another piece of Texas Jack's history, a picture of America's first cowboy star on the back of his horse, ready to head out on an adventure with two of

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his friends, two men whose written record of those days provides such insight into Jack's life. Enjoy this "new" picture of Texas Jack, and stop by the Lincoln County Historical Museum the next time you're near North Platte. It'll take you back in time, for just a little while.



### **Minutes of the Texas Jack Association Roundup 2023 Business Meeting**

President Larry Tyree opened the business meeting at 10:15 CDT, June 17, 2023. He began by relating some of the impact of *The Texas Jack Scout* that is sent to some of the museums in our shipping list. The Buffalo Bill Museum on Lookout Mountain in Denver, CO had informed him that their staff looked forward to receiving our issues. A similar expression was shared by the staff at the Buffalo Bill Museum in Le Claire, IA, and that issues are put into a 3-ring binder on display for all to see.

Larry then went over the modified itinerary for Saturday. In order to simplify paying our bills at checkout, individuals will pay the full bill. Then Treasurer Rick Omohundro will reimburse each room the difference of \$40 per night once all have returned home.

We have extra Texas Jack mugs and pens that will be advertised in the *Scout* for \$10 and \$5 respectively for the next couple years.

#### **BYLAWS**

Our Bylaws were last changed in June 2020. A couple minor additions need to be discussed and made.

President Tyree suggested that we modify the Bylaws with the following paragraphs to Article 6.2:

"If a business meeting needs to be held either on an emergency basis, or due to inability to hold an in-person roundup meeting, then Zoom or other similar media may be utilized for said meeting."

***(Historical Note:*** By tradition in the TJA, business meetings have taken place at Roundups. The Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020 to 2022 caused the association to postpone the Roundup several

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*times. Meetings were held online by Zoom and business was conducted and approved as an alternative.)*

Also,

Twelve additions of “triennial” or “three” were modified in the Bylaws to accommodate the general change to the three-year interval between Roundups as approved in 2020 regarding various facets of the business meeting and reports.

After discussion, the motion was moved and seconded. The unanimous vote will allow the changes to be incorporated in the Bylaws.

In some years, individuals may not be able to attend the Roundup and be present at the roundup business meeting. In order that they be able to nominate and vote for officers, there should be a mechanism that is available. While this is already a feature in the existing Bylaws, increased emphasis would be a good idea. Rand McKinney suggested that email could allow persons to vote in elections if they cannot be present. Larry suggested also that some could participate electronically if desired. He cited his own experience in several roundup business meetings. Matthew Kerns said we need to specify a certain period of time to vote virtually and/or by email and suggested to begin voting 30 days early with the slate included in the *Scout*. A deadline will be established for the virtual and email votes. Larry mentioned also that the slate of officers as they were known at the time of publishing the March 2023 *Scout* were included, but that better emphasis could be arranged for. Matt mentioned that he could set up a forum on the website for members to nominate, vote, and comment for future Roundup Business Meetings. Robert suggested that the vote should be finalized at the business meeting. Rand suggested that we take no longer than twelve months to share this information. Larry said that he will put an article in the *Scout* to clarify these changes and suggestions. Candice McKinney suggested that non-computer people could be notified by snail mail and/or the *Scout* as Beryl Caterson suggested.

### **AUDITS**

President Tyree indicated that currently the Bylaws state at Article 10.4, “*The Finance and Legal Committee shall arrange for a qualified accountant to conduct and independent audit...*” At present, there is not enough money involved in our annual finances to justify an audit. He proposed that we change the word “shall” to “may”. This change will not alter the ability of the organization to call for such audits. Rand moved and Robert Omohundro seconded the motion to approve these changes. The vote was unanimously in favor.

### **SCRAPBOOK DISCUSSION FROM 2020**

Matt informed us that Josephine’s personal scrapbook was sold by the family. Information on the history of it was broadcast on the television show “History Detectives” in 2004 or 05.



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David Gindy currently has it in a safety deposit box in Florida. Mr. Gindy sent photos of the scrapbook to Matt. Matt will try to obtain it to preserve it, because acid from the tape used is causing damage, and the items in the scrapbook are a historical treasure. Rob suggested free membership to Mr. Gindy, so he will receive the *Scouts* and better understand the worth of the items in the scrapbook.

### **NEXT ROUNDUP**

Several suggestions were discussed. Rand suggested returning to San Antonio, TX. It was the trail head for many cattle drive trails including the Chisolm Trail. It also has the Alamo, and a lovely Riverwalk. Larry suggested that in the Denver area as a base, there are the Buffalo Bill Museum at Lookout Mountain, the gravesite of Buffalo Bill, and in Leadville, the gravesite of Texas Jack and buildings that he and Josephine visited. It was also suggested that Richmond, VA, is near the Omohundro family origins, that there are many Civil War battlefields to choose from, other museums, and locations of interest in Virginia.

Two major anniversaries will be coming in 2026 and 2030. After discussion, a long-term plan was devised: It would allow us to celebrate 180 years since Texas Jack's birth at the 2026 Roundup in Richmond, and a Sesquicentennial (150 years) since Jack's death at the 2030 Roundup in Denver area. Four years span the difference between the two events, so there would be a one-time change to a 2-year interval for the 2028 Roundup in San Antonio. Robert moved that we begin to plan for Richmond in 2026 and further planning for 2028 and 2030 to continue online, and at the 2026 Roundup. It was seconded by Rand. Unanimous vote in favor.

### **TREASURER'S REPORT:** Rick Omohundro

Period: 01/01/19 to 06/14/23

Credit: Charity from Amazon\* \$ 23.59

Donations	904.87	Debit: Scout Printing etc.	\$5,234.36
Dues	6840.56	Reimbursements	1,982.67
Registrations	2640.00	Misc.	120.19
Zoom Auction	243.70		\$ 8,227.22
Misc.	164.60		
	<u>10,817.32</u>	Balance: (01/01/19 to 06/14/23)	\$2,590.10

Total Cash on Hand: \$ 11,871.51

*\*Amazon Smile has now ended their donation program.*

Robert reported there was nothing in the bylaws to describe the "Family" dues category. An explanatory "Everyone at one address" will be added to the new "Family" category as clarification in a new sub-article 4.5.

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### **ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Robert Omohundro-President

Matthew Kerns-President Elect (Vice President)

Rick Omohundro-Treasurer

Linda Omohundro-Secretary, Candice McKinney Assistant

### **GUEST EDITORS:**

2023: Nov.-Larry Tyree

2024: Mar.-Rob Omohundro

2025: Mar.-Larry Tyree

2026: Mar.-Matt Kerns

July-John Omohundro

July-\_\_\_\_\_

July-Linda Omohundro

Nov.-Rand McKinney

Nov.-Rick Omohundro

The business meeting was adjourned at 11:45 CDT.

Members present during the business meeting: Larry Tyree, Rene Tyree; Matthew Kerns; Rand McKinney, Candice McKinney; Beryl Caterson; Terry Omohundro, Rick Omohundro, Nancy Omohundro, Linda Omohundro, Robert Omohundro.

Also present during the Roundup: Henry Kurcharzyk, Jaime Kerns, Grace Omohundro.

*Respectfully submitted, Linda Omohundro, Secretary-Elect*

## **Janice Fox Grand Marshal**

Janice Fox, former librarian of the Lake County Public Library and Historian of Leadville, CO, has been asked to be the Grand Marshal of the Boom Days Parade. What a wonderful honor! We first met Janice at the 2010 Roundup in Leadville. The library had a nice collection of Texas Jack in a display case prominently presented. During our visit we made a presentation to add to their holdings with a framed poster of the 2010 Golden/Leadville Roundup which depicts Texas Jack and Josephine Morlacchi on stage.

*Larry presenting the poster to Janice.*



**AUGUST 4-6, 2023 Parade 10:00 am Saturday Aug 5**

## The Bank Panic of 1873

By John Thomas Omohundro

The Silicon Valley bank failures this year brought to mind the Bank Panic of 1873, often mentioned in passing in the histories of Texas Jack's time. What was it, and how did it affect Jack and his people? In the spirit of the *Scout's* mission to report on John B. Omohundro's life and times, I looked for answers to these questions.

### Panic in New York

In September 1873, John B. "Texas Jack" Omohundro, newly married to his co-star Giuseppina Morlacchi, arrived with Buffalo Bill Cody in New York City to recruit Wild Bill Hickok and open Fred Maeder's new play, "Scouts of the Plains." >>

That same month Jay Cooke and Company, the biggest bank in the U. S., announced that it could not permit further withdrawals or pay interest on its bonds and closed its doors in New York and Philadelphia. The response was swift and ugly. In September, 37 New York banks failed, and another 22 failed in Pennsylvania. Within a week the New York Stock Exchange stopped doing business—for the first time since its creation in 1817. Businesses failed for lack of access to credit, and workers were laid off. Unemployment reached 25% before the end of the year.



The repercussions of problems in New York quickly spread to financial institutions and businesses in other states. During Jack's stage season that year the country slipped into what people called the Great Depression (1874-79). Not until the 1930s did the name get shifted.

*Closing the doors of the New York Stock  
Exchange on its Members*  
Railroad Trouble

How did this happen? It's complicated. The causes were multiple and in effect for several years before the crash. Readers will also note some similarities to recent bank crashes, to be reviewed below.

Most immediately, Jay Cooke and Company went bankrupt for overextending investment in the Northern Pacific Railroad. Cooke had been the Union's biggest financier in the Civil War.

After the war, Cooke invested heavily in railroads, which were the second largest employer in the country, after agriculture. 33,000 miles of track were laid after the end of the war. Investors

## *The Texas Jack Scout*

flocked to railroad securities, excessively speculating on projects that would not show an immediate return, and a bubble was growing. In 1869 Cooke financed the start-up of the Northern Pacific Railroad, to be competition for the recently-completed Union Pacific. But construction costs skyrocketed, so he couldn't cover the bonds.



*The North Pacific's Minnetonka*

Cooke's bankruptcy occurred in an economic environment with other weaknesses. Credit had been tight in Europe since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The United States disconnected its script from silver, which weakened the "greenbacks" that Lincoln had printed to finance the Civil War. In 1871 both Boston and Chicago had great fires which slowed down their outputs.

The federal government, the major investor-angel for railroads, because it supported bonds and gave away real estate, lost interest in spending on railroads after the Credit Mobilier scandal of 1872-1873. This was one of the nation's earliest political corruption scandals. Some congressmen and the vice president were bribed with stock to permit the Union Pacific Railway's scam to raise money with fraudulent bond sales for a phony construction company.

### Consequences

During the course of this first Great Depression hundreds of banks failed: 645 in New York in 1874, for example, and 951 more in 1875. Massachusetts banks failed at about the same rate. New rail construction decreased to about a quarter of what it had been during the boom.

Of the United States 364 railroads, 89 collapsed. More than 18,000 businesses declared bankruptcy. "Building stopped, wages cut, real estate values fell, corporate profits vanished" (Wikipedia).

By 1876 unemployment in the nation reached 14%. The terms "tramp" and "bum" entered American English at this time, first applied to war veterans and then to the unemployed. Workers did not go quietly into the night, however, but began to organize, demonstrate, and strike. They



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also supported new political parties that addressed various causes of the panic: the Populists, the Greenbacks, and the Socialists. Farmers, who saw their produce prices fall and railroad transport fees rise, joined the recently-created Grange in large numbers and became a lobbying force.

The Republicans, heretofore in federal control and managing Reconstruction in the South, lost power to Democrats. Although they managed to elect Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, they had turned their attention to the economic crisis in the north and to their shrinking lead over Democrats, and Reconstruction began to come apart. Southern Democrats returned to power in the South.

Meanwhile, in Virginia



*Studio portrait of John B. "Texas Jack" Omohundro about the time he wrote to his brother Wood in Virginia*

There's little evidence that this depression impacted Texas Jack's show business career. Newspaper coverage of his successful shows usually note that the troupe played to packed houses, so there must have been enough eastern and midwestern city folk with a half-dollar to spend on entertainment.

But Jack couldn't help but think of his people in Virginia, where so soon after the devastation of the Civil War, the state was swept by the depression generated in the north. In 1874, 111 banks collapsed in Virginia, and 138 more the next year.

A *New York Times* article in November, 1873, reports from Richmond that tobacco companies are shuttered, flour mills are quiet, retail operations slowed down, and the cotton mills empty. Richmond's big iron works suspended operation, and 800 workers were laid off. "Our mechanics and laborers must have employment, or steal or starve...Operators must resume business, sell out, or break..."

Touchingly, the *Times* report ends, "We are all trying to keep up a cheerful spirit, and hope for the best," but "...there [will come] a general collapse unless our supply of capital is enlarged and public confidence restored."

We know that Jack's father, John Burwell Omohundro, never recovered his business after the war, was obliged to sell Pleasure Hill, and encouraged his sons to scatter in search of their fortune elsewhere. It's likely that the Great Depression's impact in Virginia contributed to his troubles.

Jack himself acknowledged the hard times brought by the Depression. In a letter to his younger brother, Woodville ("Wood"), in March, 1875, he alludes to the poultry business that they were planning to set up at his and Josephine's farm in Billerica, Massachusetts. He asks Wood to be patient, he was not "situated" right at the moment, so Wood was to remain in Virginia until conditions improved.

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Jack concludes his letter, "Times are duller and money scarser here than it has been since the war. I am affraid they're not going to be better in our day..." [as transcribed]

Page one of Jack's 1875 letter to his brother Wood.>

### Some Parallels with Recent Bank Panics

In 2008, pundits were comparing and contrasting the Great Recession of 2008 with the Depression of 1929, but similarities with the 1873 panic are also striking.

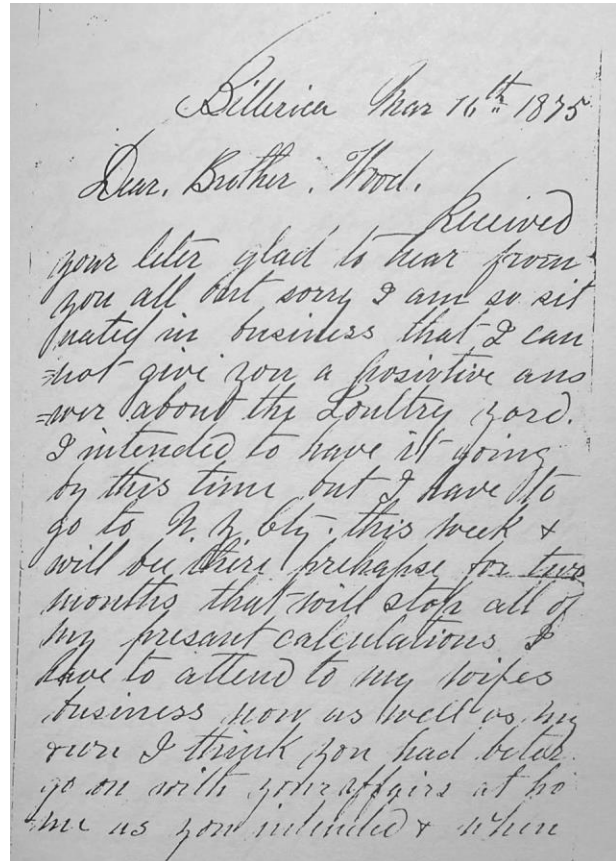
In both there was excessive speculation on investments that did not offer immediate paybacks, so keeping a cash cushion was necessary, but ignored. In both there were new and poorly understood investment instruments—tranches of sub-prime mortgage-backed securities in 2008, and a new kind of railroad bond that Cooke developed, in 1869.

In both, the president (Obama and Grant) began by trying to buy up some of the debt. In both, the New York financiers who survived the panic were called together (voluntarily in 1873, by fiat in 2008) to assist in the bail-outs.

This year Silicon Valley banks and some institutions dependent on them have been going under. The *New York Times* notes that the closing of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank are the second- and third-largest bank failures in American history. Like 1873, these banks got caught holding bonds they could not liquidate to cover calls because inflation had cut the bonds' value. This squeeze followed a heady period when venture capitalists were throwing money at risky tech startups, which then deposited the loot in Silicon Valley banks, which the federal government had allowed to become casual about their reserves.

### Conclusion: Entertainment and Hard Times

Whether guiding royalty in Yellowstone or twirling a lasso on Eastern stages, Texas Jack appears to have been fairly depression-proof, although his people in Virginia suffered greatly. The same contrast between the popular arts and the Depression occurred in the 1930s. For example, as talkies spread during that decade, Hollywood produced some of its finest films, and movie house attendance (much of which was for musicals and gangster flicks) shot up to 85 million viewers a week. It seems we need a bit of entertainment in the midst of hard times.



Sillicia Mar 16<sup>th</sup> 1875  
Dear Brother: Wood.  
Received your letter glad to hear from you all but sorry I am so situated in business that I can not give you a positive answer about the Loultry road. I intended to have it going by this time but I have to go to N. Y. City this week & will be there perhaps for two months that will stop all of my present calculations. I have to attend to my wife's business now as well as my own I think you had better go on with your affairs at home as you intended & when

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



The 2023 Roundup is in the history books! A super time was had by all!! Of course, the best part of any Roundup is the chance to see and visit with friends, relatives, and general members of the Texas Jack Association once again.

This Roundup was the occasion of several “**firsts**”.

- It was the first time that we held a roundup after a period of five years in between.
- It was the first time that the Texas Jack Association Roundup took place in Chicago.
- It was the first time that a Roundup Business Meeting took the step to plan for three upcoming Roundups.
- It was the first time that a keynote speaker’s presentation was held after lunch following the business meeting. This had an additional effect of making the banquet a very relaxing dinner with no program—other than to enjoy each other’s company.

During the business meeting consideration of where to hold the 2026 Roundup, several suggestions were made. We also realized during the discussion that several milestone anniversaries were coming in 2026, and 2030: 180 years since Texas Jack’s birth, the sesquicentennial (150 years) since Jack’s death, and half a century since the founding of the Texas Jack Association. This made the 2026 location logical to be held in Richmond, VA to celebrate Jack’s birth. Holding the 2030 roundup in Leadville and Denver was also the logical place for both remembering Jack’s life, as well as celebrating our founding. This left us with an anomaly.

Since 2020, the schedule for the rotation of Roundup years is ideally triennial. But there is a four-year gap between 2026 and 2030. No one wanted to wait four years because that would be too long. So, we made an exception and added 2028. The location will be San Antonio, TX, the trailhead of many of the cattle drive trails, including the Chisholm Trail, as well as many other western history venues.

The effect of planning ahead for the next three Roundups is amazingly freeing. In the past, it has always been a major concern of the business meeting as to where we go next time for the Roundup. So—I applaud the membership at the meeting for their foresight and willingness to go “outside the box” when needed. In 2030, the decisions will be made about the venue for the 2033 Roundup at least, and perhaps additional years if the association so desires.

To sum up the Roundup: That was the week that was!

*Larry Tyree*, President

*“Make no little plans. They have no magic...”—Daniel Burnham*

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**TO**