

The TEXAS JACK SCOUT

Volume X, Number 1

Spring 1995

"...Not So Tall, Not So Straight, and Not So Ridiculous"

Critics' Reception of Texas Jack's Debut in "Scouts of the Prairie"

by John T. Omohundro (Hannawa Falls, NY)

I gleaned the following anecdotes from *The Great Rascal: The Life and Adventures of Ned Buntline*, by Jay Monaghan, Bonanza Books (Crown Publishers, NY, 1951). Monaghan was State Historian of Illinois and the author of several works on Abraham Lincoln and westward expansion.

The Great Rascal is a well-researched look at Ned Buntline, a genuine character whom I would never like: he was an inveterate liar and not very dependable in marriage or business. But his shenanigans as reported by Monaghan are entertaining. The biography includes some revealing and little-published information about Texas Jack Omohundro. Monaghan's version is not identical in some details to Herschel Logan's *Buckskin and Satin*, published three years later and citing Monaghan.

Chapter Two is a side-splitting account of the premier of "Scouts of the Prairie" in Chicago in 1872. In *Buckskin and Satin*, Logan selectively printed the effusive praise for the company; Monaghan, on the other hand, included more of the barbed evaluations.



SCOUTS OF THE PRAIRIE: CODY, BUNTLINE, AND TEXAS JACK I (FROM LEFT) IN A RARE PHOTOGRAPH.

According to Monaghan, Buntline wrote the play's script in his hotel room a couple of days before the opening. He more or less plagiarized

continued on page 4

From the Editor's Desk

This is my first issue as editor of *The Scout*, and I have to apologize for its lateness. Unfortunately, just after I got all the materials from the previous editors, Peggy Greene and Rick Brown, and prepared to start working on this issue, I fell suddenly and seriously ill. I came down with Guillain-Barre' syndrome, a rare neurological disorder. In a matter of days I went from excellent health to virtually total paralysis. I was hospitalized for almost the entire month of March, and thus was unable to do any work on *The Scout*. Fortunately, I am recovering rapidly from this awful experience, and I expect to suffer no long-term symptoms.

This experience, combined with the sad news of the passing of Angela Wyche, made me very cognizant of just how precious good health is. I want to express personally my sadness at Angela's demise. She was a past president of the TJA, and a truly wonderful lady. She will be sorely missed.

As soon as was able to work at a computer again, I began putting together this issue. Although it was tempting to shirk my new duties as editor and plead sickness, I felt I had a commitment to live up to. As my grandfather, Malvern Hill Omohundro, Sr. (Texas Jack's brother) is known to have said, "a man's word is his bond." Taking this to heart, I made the production of this newsletter a priority.

I want to particularly thank the contributors to this issue, who spontaneously volunteered the materials herein. This newsletter, like the Texas Jack Association itself, relies on your contributions. Please send me your articles, pictures, or ideas for inclusion in *The Scout*.

I would like to announce what I believe is a first for the organization: some of the articles in this issue were submitted electronically over the Internet. Although we are an historical association, this does not mean we have to live in the past! Electronic submission is fast and easy. If you are connected to the internet, you can reach me at rand@borland.com. I encourage members who have access to the Internet to e-mail me. I will respond and compile a list of members' e-mail addresses.

Thank you for your patience and indulgence.

C. Randy McKinney (Scotts Valley, CA)

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[Note: photographs in this issue are courtesy of Julie and Dennis Greene.]

Texas Jack's Memory—Alive and Well in Denmark!

by Knud Neilsen (Frederiksborg, Denmark)

Introduction by Julie Greene (Carmel, CA)

As we all know, Texas Jack Omohundro has many ardent fans. And one of the most devoted of these hails from Denmark!

Texas Jack Association member Knud Neilsen had been reading stories about Jack ever since he was a child before World War II, and is to this day extremely interested in the American Wild West and Texas Jack in particular.

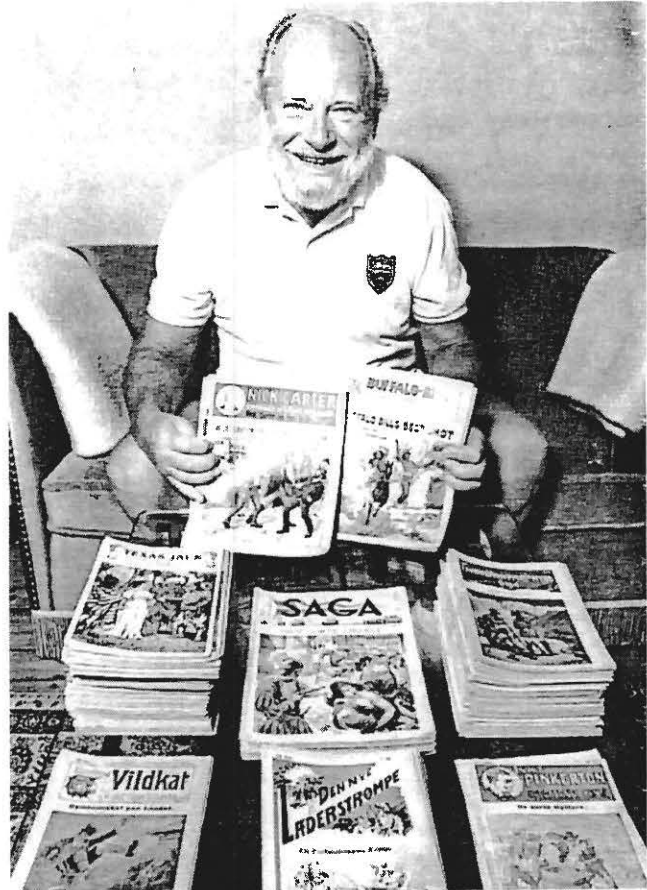
I first met Knud through the mail after finding his name in Herschel Logan's voluminous papers and correspondence that Dennis [my husband] and I purchased from Herschel's estate. Knud was one of many people with whom Herschel exchanged letters as a result of writing *Buckskin and Satin*.

When I contacted him in 1989, nearly 30 years had passed since Knud had corresponded with Herschel, so as you can imagine, he was quite surprised and pleased to hear that there was a Texas Jack Association, and that we were doing our best to keep Jack's memory alive.

In Denmark, Knud is considered an authority on pulp fiction, and exhibitions of his vast collection are well attended. He has written numerous books and articles on the subject. He kindly agreed to sell his large and valuable collection of *Texas Jack* pulp magazines (published in Denmark and other European countries) to us for future display in a museum.

I asked Knud if he would share with the members of the Association something about himself, and how he became interested in an American plainsman from so far away and so long ago. Here is his story as he wrote it to me.

My mother brought me up by herself, and she worked hard and strove to give me the best possible upbringing. We were poor, but there were many other poor people at that time. We



KNUD NEILSEN WITH HIS COLLECTION OF WESTERN DIME NOVELS

lived at Vesterbro, a working class area in Copenhagen, in a street called Dannebrogsgade, named after the Danish flag.

In the same street lived an old sailor who had gone ashore. He was a very kind person, but also a drunkard, and he lived in a cellar where he opened a small shop selling western pulp magazines. This was a true haunt to the children in the street. I ran errands for him, fetched beer for him and his friends, who were drinking in the back, and as a reward I could choose from some of the magazines strewn on the shelves or even on the floor.

All my pocket money was spent on two things, pulp magazines and western movies, starring among others Tom Mix and Hopalong Cassidy. We children truly had our heroes, they were Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack from the magazines. I soon found that Texas Jack was my favorite somehow he was a little more refined.

We had moved to Frederiksberg, a better part of town. After I finished school we could not afford a job as an apprentice, and those were difficult times with the German occupation of Denmark. I therefore got a job as a milkboy till the end of the war. Following this I took a course and was lucky to get a job at a ceramics factory as a decorator. When the factory closed down, I found employment at a firm of interior decorators in Frederiksberg. I worked there for several years, until one day my boss committed suicide.

I then started my own business, "House Beautiful," an exclusive purveyor of hand-knotted carpets, curtains and period furniture. I ran this business successfully for almost thirty years.

At this time I became seriously ill with arthritis in my neck and spine, and I had to sell everything, including my summer residence and my car, so that I could retire. But after my condition became more stable, I awaited to try out other possibilities, for instance writing, and it

turned out to my advantage. I have also been married, but we grew apart and went our separate ways. I never had any children.

My interest in Texas Jack has remained strong throughout, and my natural curiosity and inquiring mind made it important to me to get more information about the real person behind Texas Jack. I have found that there is reality behind all the myths. I contacted author Herschel Logan regarding his book *Buckskin and Satin*, that describes the real life of Texas Jack. Unfortunately he was unable to get me a copy of the book, since it was out print.

However I managed to borrow a copy from the Royal Danish Library, so I could read it. Today, this book is in my possession, thanks to my dear friends Dennis and Julie Greene. I want you to know that it is in good hands.

It has been exciting to learn the true story of Texas Jack and his lovely wife. I feel I know them so well that they might well have been close friends. I cannot help wonder what his life might have been like, had he not died so unreasonably young. I myself feel privileged to have known him, even through books.

I am 69 years old now, and I have just been elected chief of the Winterbathing Club in Copenhagen, with 550 members. Today I spend my time on modeling, filming and winterbathing and in public relations. In between, I arrange exhibitions on pulp magazines. My

latest book has just been published, so all in all my life as a pensioner is busy and fulfilling. ❖



THE COVER OF NED BUNTLINE'S DIME NOVEL, "TEXAS JACK"

...Not So Tall

from page 1

another play, Fred Meader's *Buffalo Bill, King of Border Men*, and added a new role, played by himself. Buntline told reporters he had written the script in four hours, a remark which caused one St. Louis columnist to wonder publicly why it had taken so long.

For the premiere twenty Chicagoans were hired to impersonate Indians. Mlle. Morlacchi, who was soon to marry Texas Jack, was hired as the sole female part, Dove Eye. The *Chicago Tribune* drama critic described Dove Eye as "a beautiful Indian maiden with an Italian accent and a weakness for scouts."

Under time pressure, Buntline hastened to teach the scouts their parts. Monaghan reports this conversation:

"Bill," Texas Jack asked his companion in misery, "how long will it take you to commit your part?" Cody grinned. "About seven years, if I have good luck."

The premiere was December 16, playing to a full house. Clearly, "Scouts" was a stage version of a dime novel. Published reports of its plot and acting, if we may use those terms, make Tom Mix movies look sophisticated.

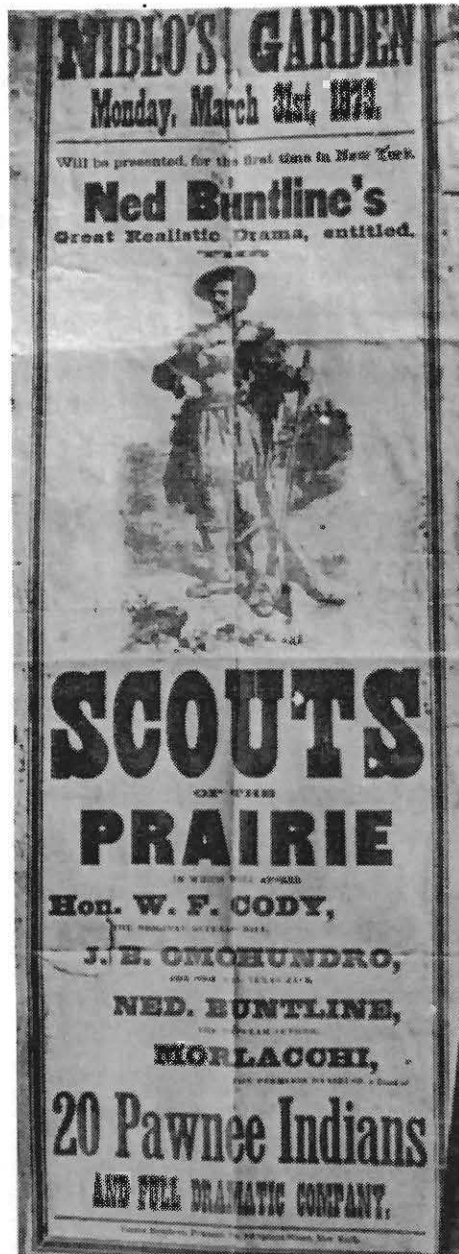
At one point, while lashed to a tree before being thrown on a bonfire, Buntline as Cale Durg lectures the audience on temperance. In spite of this, he is soon saved by Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill. Audiences reveled in the reek of gun smoke after scenes like this.

The *New York Times* characteristically commented,

On the whole, it is not probable that Chicago will ever look upon the like again. Such a combination of incongruous drama, execrable acting, renowned performers, mixed audience, intolerable stench, scalping, blood and thunder, is not likely to be vouchsafed to a city for a second time--even Chicago.

During the troupe's St. Louis performances in March, 1873, Ned was arrested for a riot he allegedly caused in that city twenty years earlier. Texas Jack held back a more impetuous troupe member who pulled a gun to defend Ned by saying, "If we were out on the plains, we might have something to say; but here in the city it is no use. We must take what comes." Buntline was tried in

St. Louis but jumped bail a few days later, taking his troupe to performances in Boston and Philadelphia. [Logan writes that Buntline waved the gun, all three men went to jail, and the



charges were dropped, even though he cites Monaghan].

"Scouts" realized its hope of a venue in New York in March, 1873. The *New York Herald* critic wrote this of the Manhattan debut:

The long promised production of "The Scouts of the Prairie" at Niblo's was accomplished last night without accident. The drama... is about everything in general and nothing in particular. Every act ends with a fight between the scouts and the Indians...The Indians, as well as the scouts, are the genuine article. Mr. Judson (otherwise Buntline) re-presents the part [of Cale Durg] as badly as is possible for any human being to represent it. The Hon. William F. Cody, otherwise "Buffalo Bill," occasionally called by the refined people of the eastern cities, "Bison William," is a good-looking fellow, tall and straight as an arrow, but ridiculous as an actor. Texas Jack is not quite so good-looking, not so tall, not so straight, and not so ridiculous....

Everything was so wonderfully bad it was almost good. The whole performance was so far aside of human experience, so wonderful in its daring feebleness that no ordinary intellect is capable of comprehending it.

In May 1873 Cody and Omohundro, feeling exploited, notified Buntline that they were continuing the show without him. They hired

Wild Bill Hickok, a real gunfighter, to take Ned's place. Cody and Omohundro went on to success in the 1873-4 season performing "Scouts of the Plains," aided by the publicist Major John M. Burke. Irrepressible, Buntline fielded a new company of real Indians and two new scouts, "Arizona Frank" and "Dashing Charlie, the Texas Whirlwind," both heroes of his most recent dime novels.

Judging from these excerpted reviews in contemporary newspapers, drama criticism hasn't changed much in the last century. Most accounts overlooked the bad plays and found the amateurishness of the two real prairie scouts to be endearing. Audiences loved Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill for their naturalness in contrast to the scenery-chewing urban actors of their day.

As much was said about Cody's beauty and grace as about Mlle. Morlacchi's. Texas Jack comes across as competent and capable of wondrous tricks with ropes, knives, and guns. Behind the scenes, he was the force that kept Cody from escaping back to the prairies—and perhaps obscurity—as a highly paid hunting guide and anachronism. ❖

A Texas Jack Commemorative US Postage Stamp

How You Can Make it Happen!

by Julie Greene (Carmel, California)

Last year, the US Post Office issued a block of commemorative stamps honoring the "Legends of the West". Many familiar names were represented: Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill Hicock, Annie Oakley, Wyatt Earp, Geronimo, as well as a few not-so-well-known characters. BUT NO TEXAS JACK!!

We all know that Jack belongs on a US stamp, but to make it happen, we will have to work together.

Included with this issue of the *Texas Jack Scout* is a letter to the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee. Please put your name and address at the top, sign it, and mail it as soon as possible.

If you could send a further letter in your own words in the months ahead, it would have a big impact.

If we all join in lobbying the committee with these letters, we have a good chance of getting a Texas Jack stamp within two or three years!

The "Legends of the West" series was very successful for the Post Office. If they issue a second set of stamps in this series, as they did



THE CURRENT "LEGENDS OF THE WEST" STAMP BLOCK
ISSUED BY THE US POSTAL SERVICE

for their Civil War figures series, then there is still a chance to get a stamp for Texas Jack!

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF THE PEN IN GETTING THE POST OFFICE TO ACT. SEND YOUR LETTER NOW! ❖

Texas Jack, Calendar Guy

by John T. Omohundro (Hannawa Falls, NY)

Texas Jack Omohundro has gained a spot on a nice looking calendar from Smith and Wesson. The calendar is entitled, "Heroes and Legends of the Wild West: The Smith and Wesson Fourth Edition Collector's Calendar 1995" (Smith and Wesson, 2100 Roosevelt Ave, Springfield MA 01102). It came to my attention when one of my students, whose husband collects antique guns, saw the calendar at a local gun shop. Copies can no doubt be had directly from the company.

Texas Jack shares the calendar with the faces and rods of Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill Hickok, Annie Oakley, General Custer, Teddy Roosevelt, and Belle Starr, among others. While each of these legends is pictured and described, much space is devoted to displaying their guns. Texas Jack is featured in the month of August. In a still life beside a photo of Texas Jack in wild west show garb is a Smith and Wesson Army .44, shown left side, and an old yellowed cartridge box of bullets. The text reads:

John Burwell Omohundro Jr 'Texas Jack'. Born and Raised near Palmyra, Virginia, Jack Omohundro received a traditional Southern upbringing. While still a young man, he journeyed to the Southwest in search of adventure, and by 1861 was working on a cattle ranch in Texas. With the outbreak of the Civil War he returned to Virginia to serve in the Confederate Army and became a member of Major General "Jeb" Stuart's cavalry. It was while serving in the cavalry that he obtained his nickname "Texas Jack."

At the end of the War, Texas Jack returned to the western frontier where he worked as a military scout. While in this capacity he met William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, Wild Bill Hickok, and many other of the Western legends. His short career covered the full

gamut from western hero to Indian fighter, frontier scout, cowboy and showman with Buffalo Bill. In 1873 he married the famous danseuse Mlle. Morlacchi, and in the spring of 1880 they moved to Leadville, Colorado. It was here, on June 28, 1880, that the gallant plainsman and Indian fighter died of pneumonia.



Texas Jack was known to have a nickel plated Smith and Wesson Model #3 American First Model, one of the 200 nickel plated variations that the US. Government purchased in March of 1871. Texas Jack's revolver was engraved with

his name and Cotton Wood Spring, 1872.

I cannot vouch for all of these facts. Two items caught my eye. First, Omohundro got his nickname not in the cavalry but driving cattle as a civilian shortly after the Civil War. Second, the .44 shown in the calendar is no doubt genuine but it is not Jack's, because there is no engraved plate on the revolver's left side. These are nit-picks, however; it is proof of our hero's claim to fame that he is featured in such an attractive calendar. Get one. ❖

Texas Jack Markers To Be Erected in Leadville, Colorado

by Julie Greene (Carmel, California)

Many of us well remember the dedication of the Highway Marker designating the birthplace of Texas Jack Omohundro in the summer of 1988 in Fluvanna, Virginia.

Now the Texas Jack Association, in conjunction with the city of Leadville, Colorado, will erect two historical markers on the main road at either end of Leadville, designating the place of Jack's death and the site of his burial.

The Markers will read as follows:

JOHN B. "TEXAS JACK" OMOHUNDRO

1846-1880

BORN IN VIRGINIA, TEXAS JACK CAME WEST AFTER THE CIVIL WAR AT AGE 16 TO BE A COWBOY. HE LATER MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF AS A PLAINSMAN AND US. GOVT. SCOUT WHO LED THE PAWNEE INDIANS ON THEIR SUMMER HUNTS AND WAS GUIDE FOR SUCH NOTABLES AS THE EARL OF DUNRAVEN.

IN 1872, WITH FRIEND W.F. (BUFFALO BILL) CODY, HE ACHIEVED NATIONAL FAME BY STARTING THE FIRST WILD WEST SHOWS IN AMERICA. (TEXAS JACK WAS HONORED POSTHUMOUSLY IN 1994 BY INDUCTION INTO THE NATIONAL COWBOY HALL OF FAME'S HALL OF GREAT WESTERN PERFORMERS LOCATED AT OKLAHOMA CITY).

JACK AND HIS WIFE, THE CELEBRATED DANSEUSE MLE. MORLACCHI RESIDED IN LEADVILLE WHERE IN JUNE 28, 1880 HE DIED AT AGE 33. HE IS BURIED IN LEADVILLE'S EVERGREEN CEMETERY.

Edna Nees is dedicating one of the markers as a memorial to her late husband and Texas Jack Association member John Nees. John, who died tragically in 1994, was the grandson of Jack's sister, Arabella. The other marker will be erected by the Texas Jack Association.

Future issues of *The Scout* will give the date of the dedication ceremony, that will include association members as well as Leadville residents and dignitaries. We are considering holding it in the summer of 1996 just before or after the Memphis Roundup, in order to allow those who can arrange it to book a flight that include stops in both Memphis and Denver. Most airlines allow one stopover in addition to the final destination, thus making it easier for members to attend. We would like to receive feedback from the membership in making this final decision.

In the meantime, I encourage members to contribute to the cost of this important project, so as to not completely deplete our treasury. EDNA NEES IS PAYING FOR ONE OF THE MARKERS, so it would be nice if we could all pitch in and help defray the almost \$1,500 cost of the other one.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to this worthwhile cause, checks can be made payable to The Texas Jack Association and sent to:

R.C. Omohundro
P.O. Box #5
Fork Union, VA 23055



In Memoriam: Angela Wyche

The Texas Jack Association lost an energetic supporter, past president, and dear friend when Angela Grizzard Wyche passed away on April 6, 1995 in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Angela was 68 and lived in Virginia Beach. She died peacefully in her home after a long illness.

Angela was president of the Texas Jack Association from 1986 to 1988 and was the main organizer of the 1988 Roundup in Richmond. She attended every Roundup except the first one (she missed that one only because she didn't know about it). Attendees of the last Roundup in San Antonio will remember her presence despite her debilitating illness, and her touching gesture of arranging a parting gift for exiting president Kitty Pelkan at the final banquet. Angela was very active in the association, and is remembered as being energetic, enthusiastic, and always having something useful to contribute.

Born in Greensville County, Virginia, Angela graduated from Mary Washington College in 1948 with a bachelor of arts degree in English and history. Angela, who taught English and history, worked for middle schools and high schools in Virginia Beach and surrounding areas

before she retired. She was a member of the Eastern Shore Chapel Episcopal Church and the Mary Washington College Alumni Association. Over the years, she was very active in the alumni

association and was presented with the Mary Washington College Alumni Association Service Award in 1994 for her involvement with the organization. She was also active in Delta Kappa Gamma, an honorary society for teachers.

In addition to her connection to Texas Jack through her husband, Malvern, the family recently discovered that Angela is also related to Mary Ball Washington (George Washington's mother) for whom her alma mater is named.

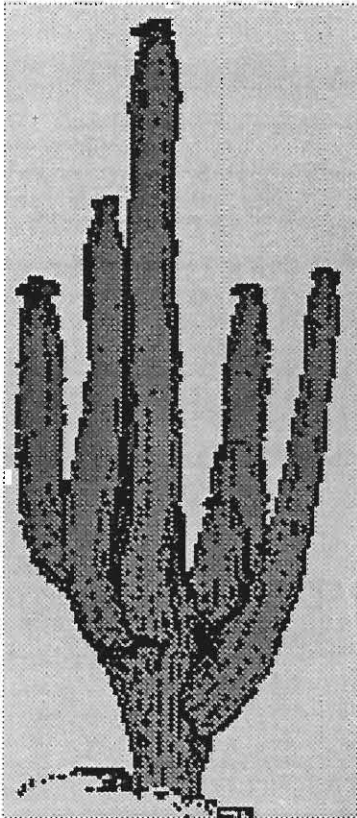
She is survived by her husband of 45 years,

Malvern H. Wyche Sr., her daughter, Kitty Wyche Pelkan of Seattle; her son, Malvern H. Wyche Jr. of Buxton, NC, two brothers, Everette Grizzard of Cary, NC, and Harold Grizzard; and two grandchildren, Brandon and Holly Wyche of Buxton, NC.

The family suggests contributions to the ALS Association, 21021 Ventura Blvd., No. 321, Woodland Hills, CA 91364 or to St. Martha's Herb Garden Circle, 2020 Laskin Rd. Virginia Beach, VA 23454.



Notes from the Trail...



- The made-for-TV movie, "Buffalo Girls," based on the novel of the same name by Larry McMurtry, aired on CBS on April 30th and May 1st. It featured Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill Hickock, Calamity Jane, and other stars of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. Although Texas Jack appeared in the novel, he was not in the teleplay. Although highly fictionalized, the movie was an entertaining and sometimes poignant look at the fading days of the wild west.

- The Library of Congress Special Collections department is exhibiting one of the most extensive collections of photographs from the Old West, the John C.H. Grabill Collection, featuring photographs of frontier life in Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming, from the late 19th century.

- I would like to compile a Texas Jack bibliography. To help with this project, please send *The Scout*, names of books or periodicals that mention Texas Jack. Include the publisher, date of publication, author, and a brief description of the nature of the reference (i.e. merely a mention or a lengthy section). In particular, I am interested in finding out about little-known references! This is a long term project, but hopefully we can publish comprehensive bibliography some day.

- The April issue of *Outside* magazine was a special issue entitled "Cowboy Nation." It included sections on the mystique of the cowboy, modern-day cowboys, cowboy apparel, and so on.

"The cow-boy! How often spoken of, how falsely imagined, how greatly despised (where not known), how little understood... I've been there considerable....How old Sam Houston loved them, how the Mexicans hated them, how Davy Crockett admired them, how the Comanches feared them, and how much you beef eaters of the rest of the country owe to them...."

—J.B. Omohundro (24 March 1877)

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Remember to mark your calender for the next TJA Roundup...
Summer 1996 in Nashville, Tennessee!

REMINDER!
PAY YOUR 1995 DUES...
(send to address above)

**YOU WON'T GET ANOTHER ISSUE OF "THE SCOUT"
IF YOU HAVEN'T!!!**

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