

## The Old West, Part I

The Old West, “history” that instantly appeals to the hearts and imaginations of most of us, has been incredibly influential, particularly in view of its short life (the second half of the nineteenth century). The first Western movie, The Great Train Robbery, arrived in 1903 and was eleven minutes long. In Old Arizona (1929) was the first major sound Western. The Buffalo Nickel “reigned” 1913-1938. It was designed by James Earle Fraser, sculptor of the Indian statue “End of the Trail.” The buffalo was modeled after Black Diamond, a bison in Bronx Park Zoo. The Indian head was a composite from photographs of three visitors to President Theodore Roosevelt: Iron Tail, a Sioux; Big Tree, a Kiowa; and Two Moons, a Cheyenne. As the editor says in The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, “This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.”

As a child in North Carolina, I saw some four movies a week and have never gotten over my cowgirl outfit (brown fringed skirt and vest with red hearts for pockets, boots, hat, gun and holster) or Jeff Chandler as Cochise (Broken Arrow, 1950). [By the way, Cochise was the name of Little Joe’s horse in Bonanza.] In 1994, my husband Emory and I chaired Western Night at Carolina Trace Country Club (Sanford, NC). In the midst of my sharing that palm reader Lee Bain, the sister of Lash [A] La Rue, lived in Sanford, our compadres on the committee shot from the hip that they’d never heard of him and allowed as how he must have been purely Southern. But Tim Morrissey, Artistic Director of The Temple Theater in Sanford, later drygulched this Southern-only rumor by sharing that he saw Lash crack his whip in Kenosha, Wisconsin! My ultimate response to such ignorance was a 4 x 8-foot Western collage displayed at and The Kemo Sabe (thirteen ten-point pages) distributed at the dance. Later came the blank verse poem [Laurels, 7.1 (Spring 2003): 46], “A-Gnash, A-Rue for Alfred



‘Lash’ La Rue.”

I have continued to write about the Old West, including a play/screenplay, Lillie Langtry’s “Lash La Rue Sweet Potatoes” World Crusade, Or, Why You Can’t Buy Quintessential Western Wear Boots. It’s about a girl named for Miss Lillie, the singer who was the beloved of Judge Roy Bean, the “Law West of the Pecos.” The best retort I’ve ever received resulted from it. I was speaking to fifth-graders. The plump young man on the front row waited for his chance: “What is the name of your latest play?” When I rolled out the Lillie Langtry, he fired back from the “lip”: “Bet you can’t say that three times!”

My father and I used to listen to The Lone Ranger on the radio. I was a member of The Lone Ranger Club and had a mask and a brown corduroy jacket with the Masked Man’s insignia. Its zipper stuck when I was in the first grade, and my teacher, “Miss Maggie,” assigned my first boyfriend, Litchfield Patterson Huie (who died in Vietnam) to deal with it. We sold Merita bread, the sponsor, in our country grocery store, and it placed collectible pictures of scenes from The Lone Ranger and other “pop lit” in the loaves.

You probably know much of the earlier Lone Ranger lore. At Bryant’s Gap, John Reid; his brother, Captain Daniel Reid; and four other Texas Rangers were ambushed by Butch Cavendish and the Hole-in-the-Wall gang. Nursed back to health by Tonto, his faithful Indian companion, he became “the Lone Ranger.” Tonto, played by Jack Todd (radio), Jay Silverheels (TV), and Chief

Thundercloud (movies), called him Kemo Sabe (“faithful friend”). My memories are principally of Clayton Moore as the “hero” and Jay Silverheels as Tonto. “Who was that masked man?” was asked at the end of Lone Ranger television episodes. The hero became known especially for his silver bullets and “Come on, Silver! Let’s go, big fellow! Hi-yo, Silver! Awa-a-ay!” The satirical humor of the 2013 movie with Johnny Depp has Tonto hoping he never hears that again. Rossini’s “William Tell Overture” is the theme song of the Lone Ranger. [It’s also known as “The Mickey Mouse Overture” from Mickey’s having conducted it in a Disney cartoon.] You may not know that Britt Reid, The Green Hornet, is the grand-nephew of the Lone Ranger and that his horse Victor is a descendant of Silver. Family is important in Westerns—just think of all those brothers (e.g., the Earps; the Daltons, who are cousins to the James Brothers and Younger Brothers).

I am apparently the only person in America who loved the Depp version, though I lament the absence of Tonto’s horse Scout (earlier called White Feller and Paint, incidentally). I also question Silver’s pink eyes and the weird rabbits. After Emory and I saw the movie in the afternoon, I sent an e-mail to my half-sister, 16 years younger and a lawyer in Charlotte. She read it on her I-phone while sitting in the movie with her husband waiting for it to start! She used to watch it on television with our grandmother, who had to play Tonto to her Lone Ranger.

I don’t always like “high camp” and “send-ups,” even Johnny Depp’s. But this movie drew on the past in ways that I haven’t seen critics crediting. But they don’t often credit Westerns with very much generally and seem to forget “learning curves.” Despite the claim that “oaters” (a name I detest!) are always White Hat vs. Black Hat, I don’t find them so. See Gregory Peck in Duel in the Sun and John

Wayne in The Searchers, in which his “infraction” is far more serious than his “man stand” in The Shootist: “I won’t be wronged. I won’t be insulted. And I won’t be laid a hand on.” Yes, they could have boo-boos, as in Stagecoach, when tire tracks can be seen during the Indian chase across the salt flats. Yes, they could be moralistic, as in the “sweet” rules of the Roy Rogers Club and Gene Autry’s “Cowboy Code” (though the latter’s “A cowboy must never shoot first, shoot at a smaller man . . .” is a hoot [and not a Hoot Gibson!]).

Diversity was not absent, as we might suspect, in the Western tradition bequeathed us. The Mexicans are there and include a woman, Lupe Velez, known as the “Mexican Spitfire,” though Rodolfo Acosta, the Mexican-American character actor, frequently played villains. The Cisco Kid may not always have been “authentic” and may have been created by North Carolina’s O. Henry (William Sydney Porter), but he brought us Mexican culture, as did Zorro, who, among others, was played by Reed Hadley and Clayton Moore, both of whom were cast as the Lone Ranger. But I dare not forget that we did enjoy also Mexican mouse Speedy Gonzales of the movie cartoon. Real-world relevance can be found, too. Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos (1957-1994) wore a black ski mask, black military uniform, and bandoleers with red cartridges crossing his chest and was a mixture of Zorro, the Lone Ranger, and Batman.

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### TOOL

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The overlay district is intended to be a balanced and reasonable tool to help manage new development in accordance with the Downtown Vision Plan and the long-term community outlook for the area. The overlay’s district area of focus is within about a quarter mile of the historic and iconic Chatham County Courthouse.

The Town of Pittsboro will hold a public input session on the overlay district on Monday, May 14th and a public hearing on Monday, May

28th at Town Hall. The Planning Board will review the public comments and input and will make its recommendation on Monday, June 4th. The Town Board will receive recommendations from the staff and Planning Board on Monday, June 11th. If the Town Board is comfortable with the recommendations, it may adopt an ordinance that will establish an overlay district at its June 11th meeting.

Residents who care about the future of the downtown are encouraged to attend the public hearings and/or email your comments to Mayor Cindy Perry at cperry@pittsboronc.gov.



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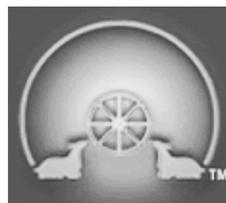


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