Saddlebag Newsletter

November 2025

Pam Potter, Editor

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A supplement to the WWHA *Journal*

Available On-Line via
www.wildwesthistory.org

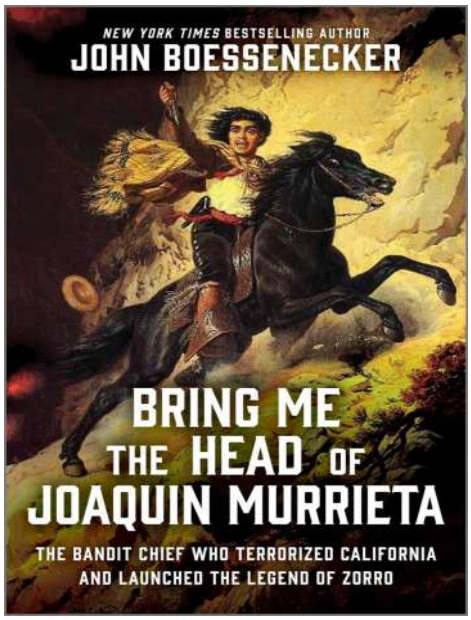
Welcome to the Saddlebag Newsletter. Here is the latest information from WWHA. Previously posted Saddlebag newsletters will be found by date further down this section in the list of available newsletters. All earlier information will be retained for reference.

If you have Wild West news, please contact the editor at the e-mail address shown at the top of the Saddlebag page. We reserve the right to include or not include any materials submitted to us.

Our **YouTube** page: https://www.youtube.com/@WildWestHistoryAssociation/videos is now monetized so WWHA gets paid for views**. Please subscribe, watch and like our videos, and you are contributing to WWHA. It is free. We now have over 9000 subscribers.**

Congratulations to our newest WWHA members:

Dennis Shields, Apple Valley, CA
Billie Holladay Skelley, Joplin, MO
John West, Scottsdale, AZ
Adam Schurle, Minnetonka, MN
Welcome back James "Hoss" Tucker as a Gunfighter.

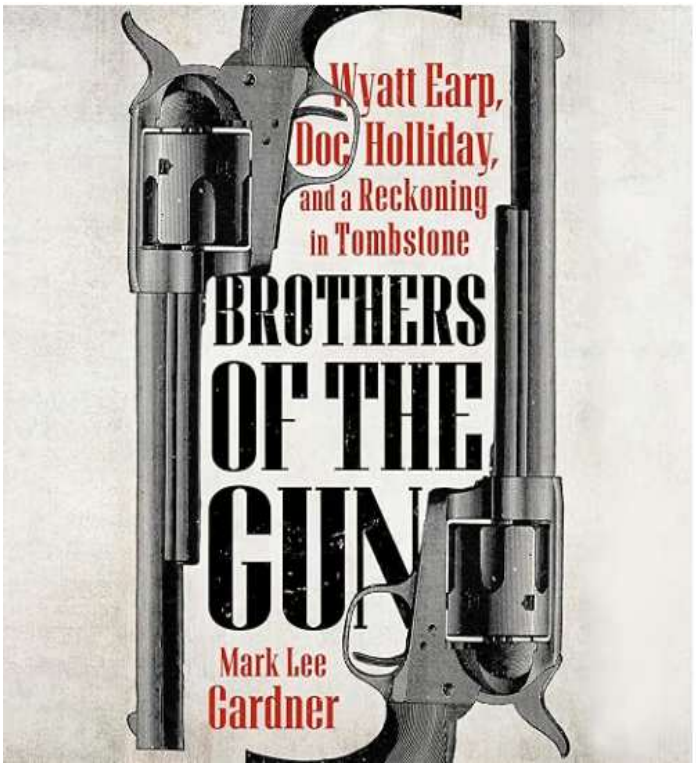


Welcome and we hope to see you all at our exciting Roundup in July.

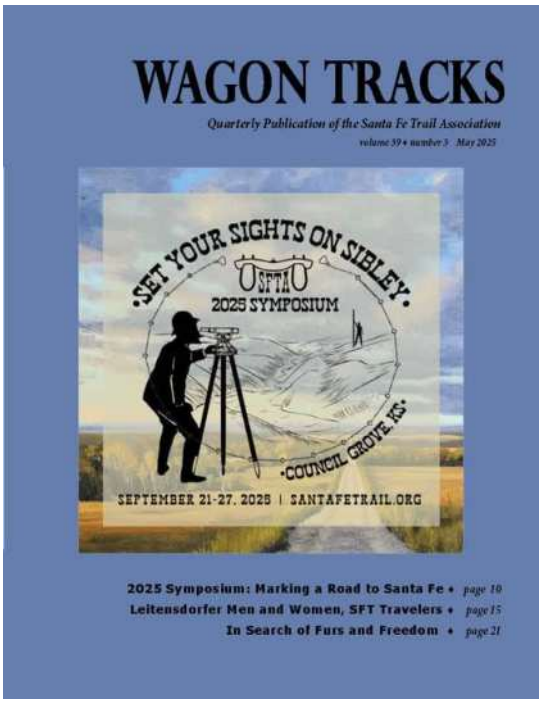
Don't forget, John Boessenecker has a talk Nov. 9, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. -- Homestead Museum, 15415 Don Julian Rd, City of Industry, CA If you are in Southern California, this is a great opportunity to hear John speak about his new book.

Mark Lee Gardners book will be out November 11, 2025.

Brothers of the Gun: Wyatt Earp Doc Holliday and a Reckoning in Tombstone.



Santa Fe Trail Symposium



WWHA member, Gary Ohls, attended the Santa Fe Trail Association's annual symposium held in Council Grove, Kansas during 24-27 September 2025. The conference focused on the 1825-27 Sibley expedition, which surveyed the Santa Fe Trail and negotiated safe passage through the Osage and Kanza (Kaw) Indian hunting grounds. Although the Santa Fe Trail had functioned as a reliable trade route between Missouri and Santa Fe, Mexico for several years, the Sibley Survey helped to make it safer, more official, and strategically significant. The survey also held important legal, economic, political, and diplomatic implications for that part or America.

The town of Council Grove took its name from a 1825 meeting between the Sibley Survey officials and native American Indians, which occurred in a grove of oak trees near the Neosho River. This location is now in the heart of Council Grove. Meeting with native leaders was a key element of the Sibley Survey mission. In addition to being the site of this notable meeting, Council Grove served as the last opportunity for supplies and repairs along the Santa Fe Trail before reaching Bent's Fort some 600 miles to the southwest.

There are numerous structures within Council Grove that date back to the time of the Santa Fe Trail. The town of Council Grove has done a superb job of honoring its history in general, and its connection to the Santa Fe Trail and the Sibley Survey in particular. Among other things, they maintain an excellent monument where George Sibley met with the native leaders, a splendid statue of a Kanza warrior titled Guardian of the Grove, and an equally impressive statue titled Madonna of the Trail, honoring women of the pioneer era.

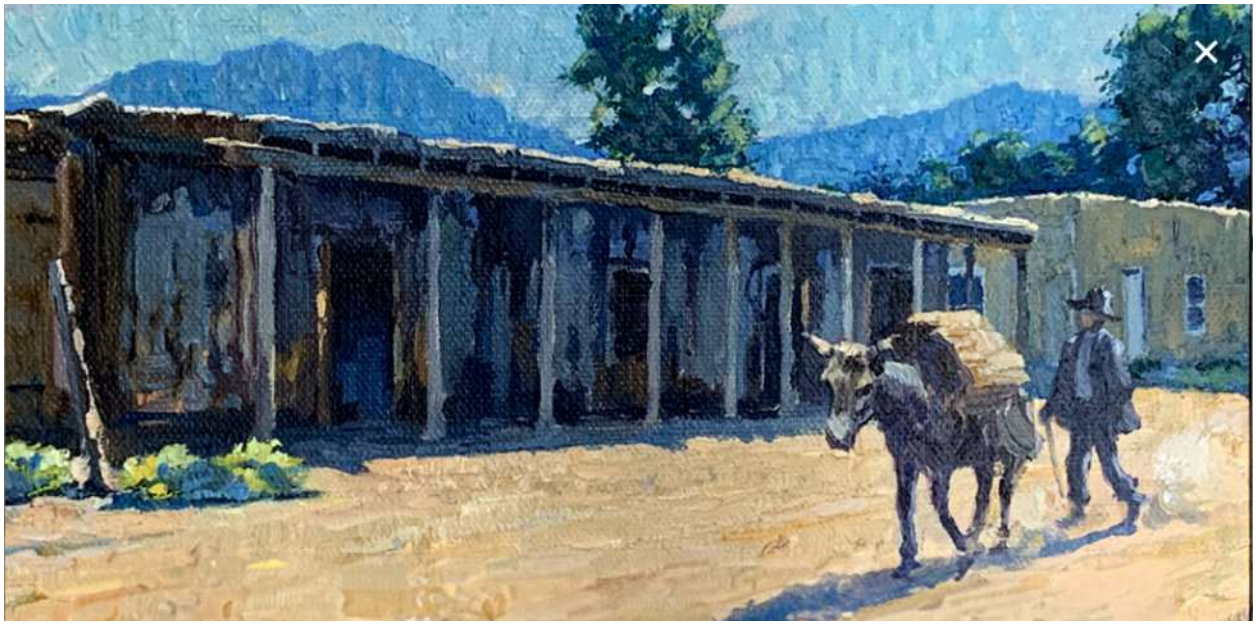
The SFTA symposium consisted of a series of excellent lectures regarding the history of the Santa Fe Trail and the Sibley Survey. It also included several bus tours to study the abundant local historical sites, as well as a visit to the U.S. Cavalry Museum at Fort Riley, Kansas. There were 105 enthusiastic participants at the symposium, mostly members of the Santa Fe Trail Association. Under the leadership of the Heart of the Flint Hills Chapter of the SFTA, this well-organized event provided both an excellent

educational opportunity and good camaraderie. Attending the symposium was an enjoyable professional experience.

Exciting news from our Roundup Chair, Tim Hagaman.

The Crowne Plaza will host the WWHA 2026 Albuquerque Roundup from July 15-18 located on fourteen acres at 1901 University Boulevard Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102. Rates are $114 per night with views of the Sandia Mountains with king or two queen beds regardless of single, double with no additional charge for an extra person. https://www.ihg.com/crowneplaza/hotels/us/en/albuquerque/abqcp/hoteldetail?cm_mmc=GoogleMaps-_-CP-_-US-_-ABQCP Complimentary parking and early checking in. Albuquerque Sunport Airport only 5 miles to Hotel or City of Albuquerque Bus ABQ Ride from airport Go https://book.abqridego.rideco.com/
Hotel Reservations call 844-356-6178 identifying themselves with Wild West History Association. Complimentary pool and non smoking property. Check-in is 3:00 PM and check out is 12:00 PM. There is transportation or complimentary breakfast. Ranchers Club Dining with Saloon and poolside cantina. https://www.newmexico.org/listing/crowne-plaza-albuquerque/386/

Wednesday July 15, 2026 kicks off with happy hour at the poolside cantina. Evening Event 5:00 PM at City of Albuquerque Museum in Old Town. Route 66 Centennial Exhibit (including items from Board Member TT Hagaman Southwest Collection) and talk by Board Member Michael Wallace. https://www.cabq.gov/artsculture/albuquerque-museum/



Our Roundup Bus Tour held on Friday will take us to the Santa Fe Plaza, New Mexico History Museum, Palace of the Governors (1610)and Los Luceros Hacienda Historic Site (1705).

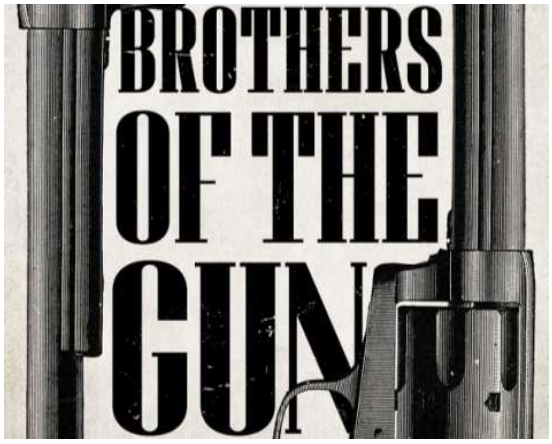
Albuquerque once a Spanish and Mexican adobe community is over three hundred years old at a cool mile high on the foothills of the Sandia Mountains along the Rio Grande River. New Mexico is the crossroads of the first Camino Real Road and Santa Fe Trail. Today you can fly into the Albuquerque Sunport, Amtrak Southwest Chief from Chicago to LA with a downtown stop at Alvarado Station. For those that like Interstate travel you may drive West or East on I-40 and South and North on I-25. You can even follow Route 66 on its 100 year Centennial from Chicago and Los Angeles to the Crowne Plaza Albuquerque Roundup. https://www.newmexico.org/route66/We're organizing auto tours to the Kit Carson House in Taos https://www.kitcarsonhouse.org/ and Elfego Baca Shootout Site in Reserve https://www.sbnm.org/Portals/NMBAR/AboutUs/committees/Historical/One_Man_One_War_Elfego_Baca_and_His_Mission.pdf?ver=70ZwyP72W-inMqijcJMSyg%3D%3D on your travel day through New Mexico on Tuesday. On Sunday July 19 on your return home we have an east bound auto tour planned to Las Vegas, Anton Chico, Puerta De Luna, Las Vegas and Fort Sumner. https://www.newmexico.org/places-to-visit/regions/southeast/fort-sumner. We look forward to seeing old friends and making new younger friends in the land of enchantment.
Here is a video about our destination hotel: https://youtu.be/p3buGfjwWMk

Tim Hagaman Conference Chair

Wild West History Association

YouTube

November 2025, Every Friday After 3:00PM



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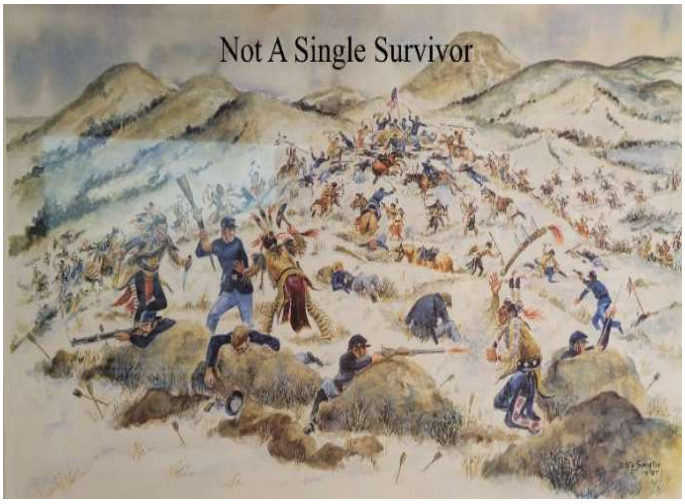

11-28

The Madness of Henry Comstock

Jacob Donovan

In July of 1868, Henry T. P. Comstock called Butte, Montana home. But while working a small claim outside the city, his mind drifted back to Virginia City and Gold Hill in 1859 and 1860, and to the silver found on "The Comstock Lode," named for him. To a reporter for the local *Daily Montana Post*, Comstock explained that that he was fabulously wealthy back in Nevada. He owned multiple homes in Virginia City and Gold Hill, and, being benevolent, allowed the poor and destitute to live in them.

Yes, at about forty-eight years old, Henry Comstock was a regular Rockefeller. The only problem was, it was all in his head.1

Born in 1820 in Ontario, Canada, Henry Tompkins Paige Comstock was the son of Old Noah Comstock of Cleveland, Ohio. Their family tree branched all the way to 1595 with the birth of William Comstock in Buckinghamshire, England. Henry Comstock grew up as a mountaineer, but didn't let that stop him from wooing the ladies. On January 26, 1854, he married Amanda Howell in Cass County, Illinois. But the love the wild, and desire to make some real money, soon led him west.2

In 1857, Comstock and several other fellows prospected outside a small mining camp called Johntown, in the westernmost edge of Utah Territory, about 175 miles east as the crow flies from Sacramento. Comstock himself had earned the nickname "Old Pancake" because he was too busy prospecting (or lazy) to turn flour to bread. Friends included the Irishmen Pat McLaughlin and Peter O'Reilly; Nicholas Ambrose, or "Dutch Nick," who operated a boardinghouse and tent saloon in Johntown; and James Fennimore, a Virginian known for his propensity for drink, for knifing a man in California, and for having two nicknames: "Old Virginia" and "Finney."3

In 1859, the prospectors pushed deeper into the canyon. Peter O'Reilly was with Pat McLghlin when what looked like gold appeared in McLaughlin's rocker, seconds before Comstock rode up on a pony. Seeing the glint, Comstock whooped, "You have struck it, boys!"4

The Ophir mine was soon established, from where the Irishmen, a few others, and Comstock—who had somehow wheedled his way in to the partnership— began taking out bluish-black stuff

from the earth. In the meantime, Comstock and Fennimore argued about what they should call the area. “I wanted it Comstock, and Comstock wanted it Virginia,” prospector Almarin B. Paul recollected Fennimore saying. “At the time I was carrying … two big bottles of whiskey, and in our heated arguments was careless as to where I stepped, when suddenly I went down and broke one of the bottles. That settled the question, when it was declared the name should be Virginia, and so it is.”5

Comstock told it differently. “In October the place was first known as Virginia and got its name in this way,” Comstock related. “Old Virginia and a lot of boys were out on a drunk, when old Virginia fell Virginia City, 1878 down and broke his bottle, and when he got up he poured out the balance of the whiskey on the ground and said, ‘I baptize this ground Virginia.’”6

VIEW OF VIRGINIA CITY, STATE OF NEVADA, IN 1868.

Unofficially, people referred to the entire area as “The Comstock Lode.” In the spring of 1859, the group had the ore assayed 125 miles to the west, in California’s Nevada City. The contents were remarkable. The ore was worth $3,000 a ton, consisting of some gold but mostly silver. George Hearst—the hardscrabble pioneer from Missouri and future millionaire and United States Senator from California—owned a gold mine outside Nevada City, and heard about the potential bonanza. Risking all, he rode a mustang 125 miles from Nevada City to Virginia City, and, now sure the bluish-black stuff was silver, purchased Pat McLaughlin’s share of the Ophir mine for $1,500. It proved a wise investment.

“I got to the Comstock and within six months I made half a million dollars,” Hearst reflected in his memoir.7

As for Comstock, he added four more claims to go along with Ophir claim: the Savage, the Gould and Curry, the Hale and Norcross, and Virginia. But, doing only mildly better than McLaughlin, who ended up as a cook in California, Comstock sold out early, making between $12,000 and $15,000. This didn’t last, and he was soon back to prospecting again—and didn’t have any claims whatsoever on the ledge that bore his name.8

From Virginia City, Comstock traveled to Oregon, and in the winter of 1861-1862 was back to shoveling gravel. Famous for his name, *The Sacramento Daily Union* kept tabs on him, publishing that the claims he sold were now worth $500,000 if he had held on to them. All of this ate at Comstock. Soon he was seen working a small claim on the Powder River. In 1864 he tried his luck in Idaho Territory, and eventually moved further east to Butte, Montana Territory.9

In a June 1868 letter to the Territorial Enterprise (the same Virginia City newspaper where Samuel Clemens had first tried out the nom de plume "Mark Twain"), Comstock bragged he had struck the "principal surface diggings," and it was soon speculated in the *Sacramento Daily Union* that he was making $100 a day, or claimed he was.10

"His intellect appears to wander," admitted a newspaperman for the *Daily Montana Post* in July of 1868, "although his hand still retains its cunning. He is a skillful prospector, but his fading recollections carry cloudy images to his darkened understanding."

The newspaperman also related that when a sick emigrant appeared at the digging, Comstock generously divided the ore mined. When seeing that it was only a paltry amount, Comstock told him, "Now, we will divide my half again, you will need it."

Comstock made his final move in the summer of 1870. Traveling further east through Montana Territory with thirteen fellow prospectors, he reached Bozeman City, where he hoped to rebuild the fortune he'd lost, or add to the fortune he sometimes imagined he still possessed. Crushing reality soon sunk in. As news from the riches still being unearthed in Virginia City—more in silver than all the gold discovered in the California Gold Rush—fifty-year-old Comstock despaired.11

On September 27, 1870, near Bozeman City, Henry Comstock put a revolver to his head and pulled the trigger. On October 1, the *San Francisco Chronicle* commented that "Comstock … was supposed to be laboring under temporary insanity."12

Henry T.P. Comstock is buried in the Sunset Hills Cemetery in Bozeman, Montana. He did not win the great game of paydirt, but in frontier mining circles his name is immortal.

1. *The Montana Daily Post, July 16, 1868*.
2. George D. Lyman, *The Saga of the Comstock Lode*, New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1949, 12; Family Search
3. Matthew Bernstein, *George Hearst: Silver King of the Gilded Age*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021, 31; Lyman, *Saga*, 31; Gregory Crouch, *The Bonanza King: John Mackay and the Battle over the Greatest Riches in the American West*, New York: Scribners, 2018, 51
4. Gregory Couch, *Bonanza King*, 59
5. Bernstein, *George Hearst*, 31.
6. *The Butte Weekly Miner*, December 22, 1883.
7. Bernstein, *George Hearst*, 32, 36.
8. *The Butte Weekly Miner*, December 22, 1883; Crouch, Bonanza King, 138.
9. Crouch, *Bonanza King*, 138-139.

10. Crouch, *Bonanza King*, 175.
11. Crouch, *Bonanza King*, 273-274.
12. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 1, 1870.

Elkhorn

Theodore Roosevelt's Ranch and a TV series

Has anyone watched Elkorn, the streaming series on Amazon Prime about Teddy Roosevelt's time in North Dakota? It should be obvious to most that it is not a documentary or docudrama but does have an historical figure and some truths. The reason I know it has some truth is, the show made me curious about what was true and what wasn't, so I did some research. If nothing else, shows like this, 1883, American Primeval, Billy the Kid, Lonesome Dove, Godless, Deadwood etc., get our historical juices flowing.

At first blush, it was a little hokey. The actors did not look like they had been to "cowboy camp" to improve their riding style. The gunfire had a little too much "pop" to it, and even some of the edits were rough. I stuck it out and the characters grew on me. I accepted the Theodore character, the protagonist Marquis DeMores was well cast as both good and evil and the beautiful yet scheming Medora, wife of the Marque, was a compelling force. So, how much of this was true? I wanted to know. We have all probably seen the picture of Roosevelt in his buckskin outfit, well, a story is built around that photo. The show is rooted in real history, even if the details are dramatized or rearranged.

If someone believes everything they see on TV or read on Facebook they are probably a lost cause anyway and no attempts at education is going to change their mind. As far as many are concerned, Pat Garrett did not kill Billy the Kid, J. Frank Dalton was Jesse James, and Kaloma was Sadie Earp. But for those who are interested in learning real history, shows like Elkorn inspire us to compare fact and fiction and seek the historical truth. It isn't billed as factual or the real history but it supports an era dear to us all.

If you can get past the first episode or two, it gets better.

The series offers a classic mix of guns, cowboys, cows and some bloodshed, throw in the U.S. Calvary, wild animals a train and good fiddle music, then you have entertainment that stimulates our interest. I walked around the house after the last episode with "Polly Wolly Doodle" stuck in my head. It could be worse.

Pam Potter

Pulitzer Prize–Winning Author Doris Kearns Goodwin Researches Theodore Roosevelt at Dickinson State's TR Center

Pulitzer Prize–winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, one of America's most celebrated presidential biographers, visited the Dickinson State University Theodore Roosevelt Center on Friday, October 3, as part of her continuing research for forthcoming projects.

Goodwin has spent five decades bringing presidents to life for readers around the world. Her book *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* earned her the Pulitzer Prize for History. **Dr. Michael Patrick Cullinane, Lowman Walton Chair of Theodore Roosevelt Studies and Co-Director of the Theodore Roosevelt Center, remarked on the significance of her visit:** "Doris Kearns Goodwin is one of America's greatest treasures, and we are so excited that she is turning her hand to another book about T.R."

Beyond her award-winning books, Goodwin is a public historian. She has served as a consultant and on-screen commentator for numerous documentaries including Ken Burns' *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History*. Her ability to connect the lessons of history to contemporary issues has also made her a familiar presence on national television and in public affairs commentary.

Photo: Left to right: Edward F. O'Keefe, Chief Executive Officer, Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library (TRPL); Doris Kearns Goodwin; Susan Sarna, Senior Curator, TRPL; and Dr. Michael Patrick Cullinane, Lowman Walton Chair of Theodore Roosevelt Studies and Co-Director, Theodore Roosevelt Center.

A Researcher Among the Archives

Goodwin, who has spent much of her career in the nation's great presidential archives, was delighted to find a resource like the TR Center in western North Dakota where Roosevelt's story is still interwoven with local memory. She praised the Center's extensive digital collections, which she uses regularly in her work.

Goodwin marveled at the efficiency of advanced searches that in other archives would require days, weeks, or months of manual review. When shown how the Center preserves not only Roosevelt's letters but also correspondence *about* figures like J.P. Morgan, she exclaimed, "This is amazing! These are going to be great!" She was particularly excited by the quick retrieval of 73 political cartoons featuring the "robber baron" J.P. Morgan.

A Message to DSU's Next Generation of Leaders

Goodwin was especially touched to learn that her book *Leadership: In Turbulent Times* is part of the curriculum for DSU's Theodore Roosevelt Honors Leadership Program. When asked what qualities today's college students should cultivate to become effective leaders, she pointed to a timeless set of traits:

1. **Character and Integrity** – the moral foundation that earns trust.
2. **Humility** – the willingness to listen, admit mistakes, and learn from others.
3. **Empathy** – the ability to understand and connect with people's experiences.
4. **Resilience** – strength to recover from setbacks and persist through crises.
5. **Accountability** – taking responsibility for decisions and actions.
6. **Ambition with Purpose** – striving not just for power but for meaningful goals.
7. **Vision** – the capacity to see a path forward and inspire others to follow it.
8. **Communication** – telling stories, shaping narratives, and making ideas accessible.
9. **Emotional Intelligence** – managing one's own emotions while understanding others.
10. **Commitment to Something Greater than Self** – serving a mission, cause, or community beyond personal gain.

Her message to students echoes Roosevelt's own conviction that leadership is not about self-glory, but about serving the greater good.

A Treasure Trove for Scholars

The TR Center staff highlighted unique holdings of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library that are currently housed at the Center, including the papers of Edmund Morris, Pulitzer Prize–winning biographer of Roosevelt, and the papers of Sylvia Jukes Morris, who chronicled the life of Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt. Goodwin praised the Center's emphasis on chronology and its "known person list," a tool that allows researchers to access information on more than 70,000 individuals connected to Roosevelt's life and times.

"It's incredible," she said. "This is shocking—in the best way. We often have to do this research physically. To see it so accessible here is remarkable."

Carrying Roosevelt's Lessons Forward

For the TR Center staff, Goodwin's visit was more than a brush with national scholarship. It underscored DSU's role in preserving Roosevelt's legacy.

As Goodwin herself has shown throughout her career, history is not only about presidents and policies, it's about people, places, and the lessons they leave behind.

By Debora Dragseth, Dickinson State University Professor of Leadership Emerita

At the 75th Anniversary show of the Texas Gun Collectors Association, WWHA member Kurt House showcased a display titled "Texas Leather and Old Man Colt," highlighting the historical relationship between Colt pistols and the gun leather used to carry them. The exhibit focused on the Colt Single Action Army, also known as the "Peacemaker" or "The Gun That Won the West," which was the preferred sidearm among lawmen, outlaws, and cowboys in the Old West due to its reliability, simplicity, and effectiveness in combat situations.

The display featured the pairing of original Colt pistol shipping destinations with harness or leather makers located in the same or nearby area. For instance, a Colt shipped in October 1881, as confirmed by factory records, was matched with a holster marked Spangenberg from Tombstone, Arizona. Such associations are uncommon and require significant effort to identify. The exhibit included 20 examples demonstrating these geographic connections, achieved through more than 50 years of collecting. The scope of the collection was limited to this specific focus.

Public service announcement

The Wild West History Association has 9.94 thousand viewers on YouTube and we have 213 videos. Let's try to get up to 10,000 subscribers! It is free, and all you have to do is go to https://www.youtube.com/@WildWestHistoryAssociation/videos and click on the subscribe button. This is a challenge. See how fast we can get up to 10,000. One-two-three-GO!! If you haven't watched our videos you are really missing out on some good history. Check out the latest video staring WWHA members Kurt House and Dave George with cameo appearances by three other members. Can you name them?

WEST FEST

The Booth Western Art Museum in Cartersville, Georgia hosted it's annual "West Fest" the weekend of October 25, 2025. West Fest (formerly The Southeastern Cowboy Festival and Symposium) is held the third weekend of October each year on the festival grounds at the museum. Wild West History Association member, David Guyton, was in attendance with the educational/living history group, Spurred West. Formed in 2019 by Robert Terry and Austin Baker, Spurred West brought their boom-town tent saloon and Faro layout where attendees could sample "Prickly Ash Bitters" and learn to play the Wild West's most popular betting game, Faro. They also had an educational display of women's Victorian Era fashions and accessories. Additionally, There were chuck wagons providing samples of cowboy fare, vendors and craftsmen, an Indian trading post and village, Native American dancers, gunfight reenactments and other western entertainment. The Booth Western Art Museum is a 120,000 square foot, world class, Smithsonian Institution affiliated art museum located about an hour north of Atlanta. For more information go to: boothmuseum.org.

David B. Guyton
Wild West History Association
Board of Directors