Saddlebag Newsletter
May 2026
Pam Potter, Editor
Spiritwind2@hotmail.com

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.

Welcome to our new members:

Thomas Sammons, Benson, AZ
Natalie Bright, Canyon, TX
Thadd Turner, Pass Christian, MS
Ken Gainer, Parma, ID
Tom Casey, Lincoln City, OR
Judith Leff, San Francisco, CA
Steve Barnes, Westerville OH
Mike and Judy Youngman have rejoined the" Gunfighters"

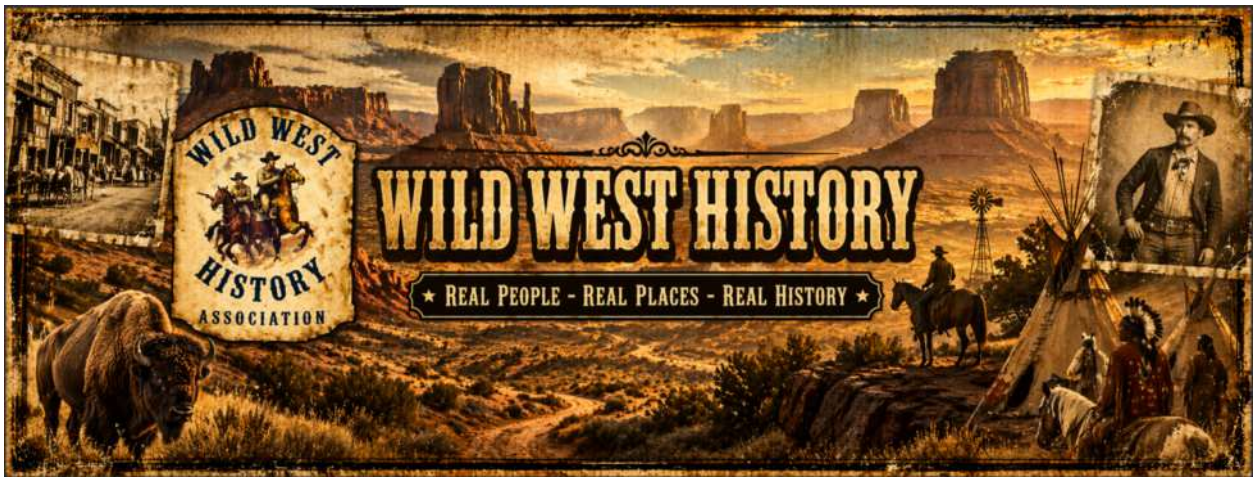
Hello Members,
I'm really looking forward to our Wild West History Association Albuquerque Roundup. This year we're hoping to have more items donated to the Silent & Live Auctions, we've had many spectacular pieces donated throughout the years to the auctions which helped immensely to WWHA's future, and they all made a huge difference to the budget. If you find yourself not able to attend, please don't hesitate to ask other members you are planning to come, bring it with them to Albuquerque, this will be much appreciated and like I said before, it helps our organization.

Thank you all so much

Paul Marquez - WWHA President

Go to the website wildwestistory.org or use the QR code to get all the information about the Roundup. The link to the hotel is on the homepage and registration is under the Roundup tab.

We have a new banner for our YouTube Channel, Facebook and Website.



The Wild West History Association Video Team was in Colorado this month, meeting up with Jeff Broome, WWHA member, historian and author who is searching for the real sight of the Beecher Island fight between the Indians and the calvary. The sight that is presently designated as the historical location has long been questioned by many historians. Jeff, through meticulous research, interviews, mapping and now metal detecting has found compelling evidence of a more probable location. Because it is on private property and more research needs to be done, we are not giving the location. WWHA will eventually have a video of our on-sight investigation and Jeff is working on a book.

Top left: jeff Broome being interviewed by Eddie Lanham. Bottom left: Jeff Broome. Middle photos : artifacts found at the site. There are both military and Indian relics.

AI and I

Daniel Buck

Asking me to comment on using AI as a research tool – which is what the *Saddlebag Newsletter* editor did -- is a shot in the dark. I'm computer inept. When stymied, which is often, I call a neighbor, and if she fails me, my techie. One is free and the other costs. And I'm only a recent AI user, though with enough experience to have opinions, ill-formed or otherwise. I have collected a few anecdotes, of the illustrative variety I hope.

Last year my young nephew told me about ChatGPT, which I had only vaguely heard of. I used it a few times, then added Google AI Overview to my quiver.

The first thing I asked ChatGPT – naturally -- was: who is the writer Daniel Buck? It didn't know, which perhaps says more about me, and offered up a *National Review* contributor and scholar on educational issues at Fordham University. I pitied the professor who had to share my name.

That was my first clue, early on, of AI's limitations. It's limited by what it finds on the web, and even with that, it triages, a fancy medical term for arranging data into some sort of order, an informational ziggurat. AI is akin to a vacuum cleaner; it hoovers up everything online it thinks is related to the question posed. Unlike your home vacuum, however, which fills a bag with dirt and dust that you empty into the trash, the AI version arranges the debris into an arrangement. The triage part. At least that's the theory. A fraught theory.

I told ChatGPT who I actually was, and *voila*, it responded with an effusive "Thank you! Yes, of course!" and congratulated me on my perspicacity -- for knowing who I was. Another AI quirk, it reflexively or perhaps better said programmatically thanks and praises its interlocutors. AI is pyschophantic. Is it ever. AI wants you to hang around. Otherwise, it has no one to play with, feed it information, and help it grow. But don't be duped by AI's fawning platitudes, because the very next day it might well forget everything you fed it and revert to its previous benightedness. You have to tell it again. Improving AI is like instructing a stubborn child. Instruct. Repeat.

Even when AI has the information at hand, because it is all online, it can act in strange ways. After digesting my article, "David L. Wood and Carlos Morales Wood: History Repeats Itself, First as Tragedy and Again as Tragedy, from last month's *Saddlebag*, I asked it (AI, in spite of its anthropomorphic personality, is definitely an *it*) to give me a summary. Google AI reported that I, rather than Carlos, was David's grandson. When I replied "INCORRECT!!," it thanked me profusely, told me I was absolutely right, and all but handed me a cookie.

Occasionally AI surprises the daylights out of you. I asked ChatGPT to translate from Spanish into English a long, turgid, sarcastic diatribe against an early 1900s politician, a

task that would have taken me all day. The translation appeared in a but second or two, along an explanation that the it was literal, but if I wanted one in everyday English or in colloquial English, just say the word. It is hard to beat that.

On another occasion, I was trying to establish when American travel writer Harry Franck visited Machu Picchu. In his book he only mentions a month, not a year. The only clue was that he was accompanied by a man name "P . . . ." I asked Google AI, which quickly read Franck's book, took note of "P . . . . ," found his book, read it, and spit back the year. Within a second or two.

I'm sure this is not an original thought, but AI as a collector and organizer of information is not unlike a book, although the book has an author. AI has a "prompt engineer." (Has anyone ever heard of a book party featuring a prompt engineer?) Yet there are similarities, good and bad. You check an endnote in a book, usually to to find that it was spot on, but occasionally the endnote does not support the author's point at all. Whatever you are relying on, check your sources.

By the way, I asked Google AI which was more grammatical as a title, "AI and Me" or "AI and I." It chose "AI and Me," though it assured me that "AI and I" was not unacceptable. I replied that I thought "AI and I" was funnier, because it has a visual and phonetic pun aspect. Google AI quickly agreed with me and asked if I wanted to brainstorm some subtitles.

"No, please no," I replied, "I have to leave."

Let's hear from *Saddlebag* readers about your ups and downs with AI. The inbox is open.

WWHA is in immediate need of a new Merchandise Manager to take over after the Albuquerque Roundup in July.
Responsibilities include ordering new merchandise for each Roundup, keeping an inventory, promoting the merchandise, and manning the table at each Roundup.
The ability to drive to each Roundup is necessary, in order to transport the merchandise.
Please contact Jean Smith, Treasurer, crystalkate@gmail.com if you are interested.
The merchandise left from the Albuquerque Roundup will be given to the new Manager at the Roundup.
The sale of WWHA merchandise is one of the fundraisers used to support our organization. Please help us out!

WILD WEST HISTORY ASSOCIATION

COUNTRY STORE

Grey Fleece Vest XL, 2XL $40

Grey Blanket In Pouch 40 X 56 $30

Black Sweatshirt Hooded &Full zip S, M, XL, 2XL, 3XL $55

Short Sleeve Denim Shirt Faded Blue: S, M, XL Ink Blue: M, L, XL, 3XL $40

Bella Heather V-Neck M, L, XL, 2XL $25

Pocket Polo Red: XL, 2XL, 4XL Blue: XL, 2XL, 3XL $35

Ladies V-Neck Front or Side Logo Peach, Lavender, Fuschia Email for Sizes $25

Ladies Knit Black: S,M,L Blue: L, XL, 2XL $40

Beige Tote Bag $15

Round Neck Tee Front or Side Logo Grey, Red, Sand Email for Sizes $25

Key Chain $4

Rawhide Money Clip $20

Spatula $25

Camo Mesh Cap $25

Pink Camo Mesh Cap $25

Guide Hat Black or Khaki $25

Prices include free shipping & a WWHA Button

To place an order, email: crystalkate@gmail.com

or, mail your order to:
Jean E Smith WWHA Treasurer
993 E Jennings Street Safford, AZ 85546

WWHA Button Freebie

Natalie Currie
Executive Director

OKLAHOMA Department of Libraries

J. Kevin Stitt
Governor

Sent to us by Michael Wallis. See yellow highlight.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 10, 2026
CONTACT
Kaylee Reed, Oklahoma Department of Libraries
Kaylee.Reed@libraries.ok.gov
Finalists Announced for the 37th Annual Oklahoma Book Awards
OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla — The Oklahoma Department of Libraries, in partnership with the Oklahoma Center for the Book, has announced the finalists for the 2026 Oklahoma Book Awards. Now in its 37th year, the Oklahoma Book Awards celebrate outstanding books and authors connected to the state. The awards ceremony will take place Saturday, May 16, at the

Oklahoma History Center.

The Oklahoma Book Awards recognize outstanding work across five categories, highlighting authors, illustrators, photographers and book designers whose books reflect the depth and diversity of Oklahoma's literary community. This year's finalists include both nationally recognized creators and emerging voices whose work shares a meaningful connection to the state.

"Oklahoma has an incredible tradition of storytelling, and the Oklahoma Book Awards allow us to celebrate the authors who continue that legacy," said Natalie Currie, executive director of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and state librarian, archivist and records manager. "Each year, these awards highlight the depth of talent connected to our state and the powerful role literature plays in preserving and sharing Oklahoma's stories."

This year's celebration is especially meaningful as the Oklahoma Center for the Book, marks its 40th anniversary. For four decades, the center has championed Oklahoma's literary heritage by recognizing outstanding writers, promoting reading and connecting readers with stories that reflect the state's culture and history. The Oklahoma Center for the Book, housed within the Oklahoma

Department of Libraries, is an affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book. Through programs like the Oklahoma Book Awards, the center promotes Oklahoma's literary culture and fosters a lifelong appreciation for books and reading.

The awards ceremony and banquet provide an opportunity to celebrate the finalists and their work while connecting with authors from across the state. Guests will have the chance to meet the authors, purchase their books and have them signed during the evening's festivities.

The Center will also present the Arrell Gibson Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing an individual's years of creativity and service. The award is named after the Center's founding president, Arrell Gibson, an esteemed historian from Norman whose impact on Oklahoma's literary field has been profound and lasting. This year, the award will be presented to Carol Haralson, an award-winning book designer and writer and 10-time recipient of an Oklahoma Book Award in the design, illustration and photography category.

Tickets are $75 for members of the Friends of the Oklahoma Center for the Book and $100 for nonmembers. Tables are also available for purchase at a discounted rate of $550. Dinner is included with each ticket. To purchase tickets, contact the Friends of the Oklahoma Center for the Book at friendsofocb@gmail.com.

Finalist List

CHILDREN

• Braided Roots – Pasha Westbrook and Madelyn Goodnight (Scholastic, Orchard Books)
• The Good Shepherd and the Stubborn Sheep – Hannah E. Harrison (Zonderkidz)
• Mary Had a Little Jam – Tammi Sauer (Hachette Book Group, Union Square Kids)
• Vampirita and the Musical Mayhem (Vampirita Book 2) – Mariana Llanos (Reycraft

Books)
• Woody's Words – Lisa Rogers (Astra Publishing House, Calkins Creek)
YOUNG ADULT
• Aubrey Helps a Ghost – Desiree Webber (G. Markle Publishing)
• Augmented (The Hybrid Series Book 3) – Candace Kade (Enclave Escape Publishing)
• August Rain – Marlo Holly (Balboa Press)• Careful What You Hear (Do You Hear What I Hear? Book 2) – Helen Dunlap
Newton (Yorkshire Publishing)
• Gittel – Laurie Schneider (Regal House Publishing)
POETRY
• Blood Wolf Moon – Elise Paschen (Red Hen Press)
• Oh, I Think I Have a Poem About That – Jim Spurr (Spurline Productions)
• Quantum Entanglement – Gary Reddin (Mouthfeel Press)
• This is the Truth – Jennifer Kidney (Clare Songbirds Publishing House)
DESIGN / ILLUSTRATION / PHOTOGRAPHY
• Making of the Killers of the Flower Moon – Authors and Photographers: Shannon Shaw Duty, Benny Polacca, Chelsea T. Hicks, Allison Herrera, Ruby Hansen Murray, Tristan Joseph Espinoza, Cody Hammer, Sherry Stinson, Echo Reed, Louise Red Corn (Osage News)
• Route 66: The First 100 Years – Author Jim Ross, Photographer Shellee Graham (Reedy Press)
• Totally Possum – Author Trey Hays, Illustrator Eli Corbin (White Dog Press)
FICTION
• Filling Station – Vanessa Miller (Thomas Nelson)
• The Kennedy Girl – Julia Bryan Thomas (Sourcebooks Landmark)
• Low April Sun – Constance E. Squires (University of Oklahoma Press)
• A Rare Obsession – Sheldon Russell (Cynren Press)
• Shadow of the Solstice – Anne Hillerman (HarperCollins, Harper)
NON-FICTION
• Belle Starr: The Truth Behind the Wild West Legend – Michael Wallis (W.W. Norton
and Co)
• Black Moses: A Saga of Ambition and the Fight for a Black State – Caleb Gayle (Riverhead Books)
• History of the Cherokee Nation – Author Rachel Caroline Eaton, Editors David Berry, Martha Berry and Patricia Dawson (University of Oklahoma Press)
• Justice For All: Dick T. Morgan, Frontier Lawyer and Common Man's Congressman – Michael J. Hightower (University of Oklahoma Press, 2 Cities Press)
• One Lucky Cowboy – Bob Burke and Gary Shutt (Oklahoma Hall of Fame)
• Peyote Politics – Lisa D. Barnett (University of Oklahoma Press)
• Sooner Doughboys Write Home – David W. Levy (University of Oklahoma Press)
• Tulsa, 2021: A Massacre's Centennial and a Nation's Reckoning – Randy Krehbiel (University of Oklahoma Press)#
ABOUT THE COLLABORATORS
The Oklahoma Department of Libraries is the official State Library of Oklahoma. It leads public library development, serves the information and

records management needs of state government, coordinates library and information technology projects for the state, and serves the general public through its specialized collections.
The Oklahoma Department of Libraries and the Oklahoma Center for the Book (OCB) has partnered with the non-profit Friends of the Oklahoma Center for the Book for more than 30 years to co-sponsor the annual Oklahoma Book Awards. Housed within ODL, the Center promotes Oklahoma authors, celebrates the state's literary heritage, and encourages reading for pleasure statewide.

*

Please submit photos of items you have for the auction at the Roundup in Albuquerque, so we can post them in the Saddlebag for people to see some of the items we are offering.

Here are some items that will be available at the auctions. Look for more in the next issue of the Saddlebag.

Paintings by George Bailey

Offerings by Kurt House

WILD WEST HISTORY ASSOCIATION YOUTUBE

Learn More About Wild West History

May 2026
Released Every Friday After 3:00PM EST

PLEASE! LIKE, COMMENT AND SUBSCRIBE
(This Channel Helps to Fund the WWHA)

May 1st

TWO ICONIC SALOONS...ONE LEGENDARY MAN. Prescott's Palace Saloon and Tombstone's Bird Cage Theater.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uD5pzen50C4

May 8th

Finding Wyatt Earp's Lost Saloon & Gambling House in Seattle (1899) --- A Historic Discovery
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6J4bvgXQkqY

May 15th

A Comanche & Kiowa Raiders Massacre. Sherman Was Marked for Death… Until an Owl Changed History.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74se-2bSrl4

May 22nd

Buggy Barn Museum. See Wagons Used in Famous Westerns! Authentic Wagons. Over 280 Wagons & Buggies.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWr_rEvwtcI

May 29th

Jack Slade's Grave – The True Story of the Wild West Gunfighter Who Was Hanged
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqUcs2Q1iSA

WILD WEST HISTORY ASSOCIATION

YouTube SHORTS

(Less Than 3 Minutes)

Learn More About Wild West History

April 2026

Released Every Tuesday After 3:00PM EST

PLEASE! LIKE, COMMENT AND SUBSCRIBE

(This Channel Helps to Fund the WWHA)

May 5th

Wounded by Comanches: The Tragic, Heroic Life of Texas Ranger Lon Moore. Related to Daniel Boone.

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/8-iANH2kmwI

May 12th

The First Killing of the Lincoln County War. A Visit to Robert Casey's Grave.

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/TO6W6A1D36E

May 19th

The man who invented Billy the Kid. Visit the grave of Ash Upson, Ghost Writer for Pat Garrett.

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/407BUkLryZI

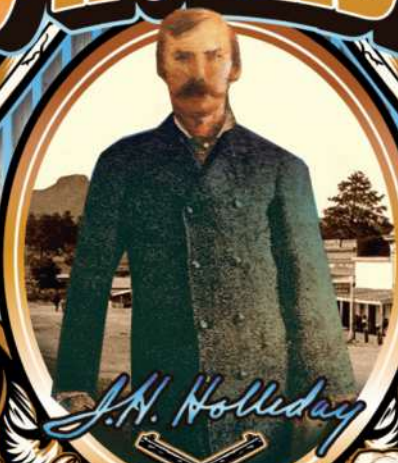
May 26th

What do Davy Crockett and Billy the Kid have in common? Both were killed, but their legends rode on..

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ZLUcAzDetWQ

PRESCOTT'S

DOC HOLLIDAZE



August 14–16

Victorian Garden Party Reception & Downtown Pub Crawl
Wild West History Forum & Catered Lunch
Gravestone Dedication for JD Kinnear
Doc's Birthday Dinner with Whiskey & Cigar Tasting
Walking History Tours

ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT SHARLOT HALL MUSEUM & WILD WEST HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Sharlot Hall MUSEUM

ELKS THEATRE

SCAN FOR INFO & TICKETS
PrescottTombstoneConnection.org
Email: Prescott.Tombstone@gmail.com
Call: 928-713-5136

Wild West History Research

Stone Circle on the High Plains: Investigating an Early Native American Ceremonial Site in Eastern Colorado

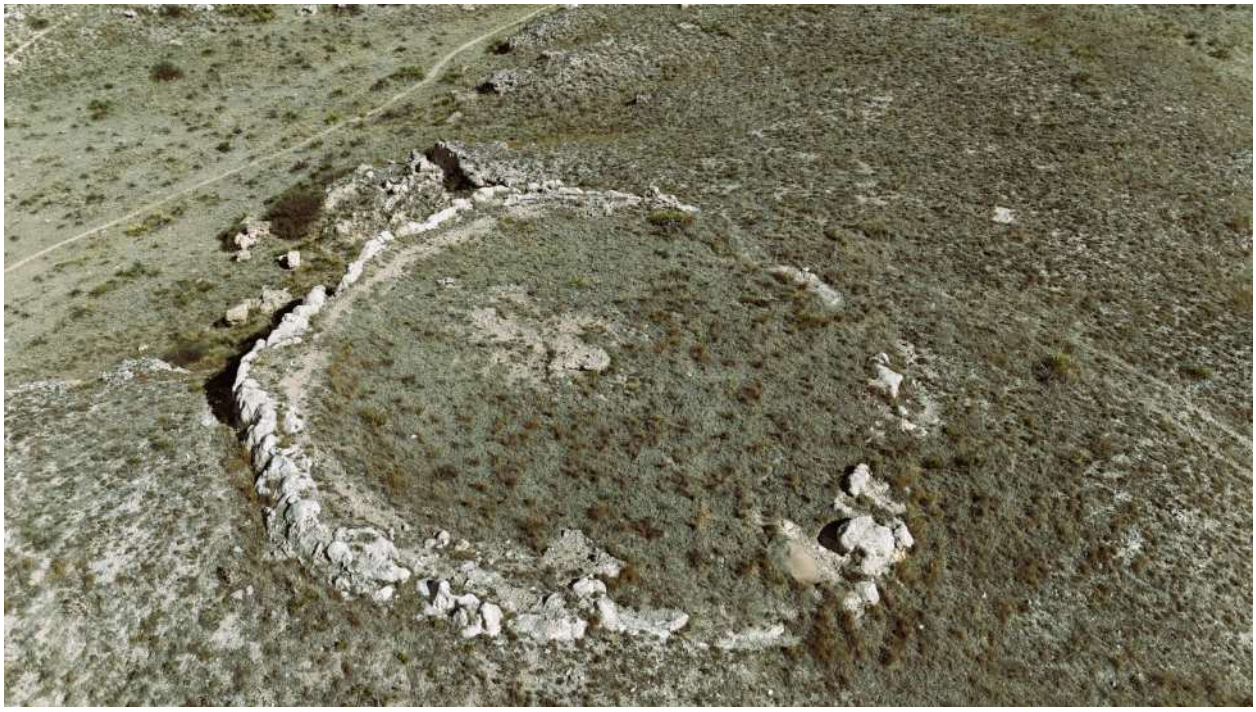
During a field survey conducted while searching for evidence of an 1860s Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho warrior encampment, members of the Wild West History Association documented a circular stone feature that appears consistent with an Early Native ceremonial or sacred site. The feature is located on private land in eastern Colorado on elevated terrain at approximately 4,000 feet above sea level, a placement often associated with ceremonial visibility and landscape prominence.

The stone enclosure measures approximately 90 feet in diameter and is composed of locally available stone arranged in a roughly circular pattern. Preliminary visual assessment suggests the site may date between 1,000 and 3,000 years before present, although no formal excavation or diagnostic artifact recovery has yet been conducted to establish a definitive age. Such circular stone features are widely recognized throughout the Plains and Intermountain West and are frequently associated with ceremonial, spiritual, and community functions.

Of particular interest is a central stone arrangement forming what appears to be an avian, or bird-shaped, figure. Similar bird effigy patterns have been documented at other Indigenous ceremonial sites across the region and may reflect symbolic associations with spiritual messengers, sky beings, or directional cosmology. Due to displacement of several stones over time—likely from weathering, livestock activity, or later human disturbance—the full form of the figure is difficult to recognize from ground level and is most clearly visible through aerial photography. The accompanying drone image was taken from approximately 100 feet above the site and provides the best perspective of the overall layout.

Circular stone structures held important ceremonial significance for many Indigenous cultures. Ethnographic accounts, including those from Northern Ute elders, describe stone circles as sacred ritual spaces used by medicine people and spiritual leaders for ceremonies involving healing, prayer, protection, and maintaining harmony with the natural and spiritual worlds. These sites were often highly individualized rather than standardized, with each practitioner conducting rituals according to personal knowledge, tribal tradition, and spiritual purpose.

The function of this particular feature cannot be determined with certainty without further archaeological investigation; however, it is reasonable to interpret the stone arrangement as a ceremonial locus. The stones may have served as a ritual boundary, a place for spiritual communication, a symbolic representation intended to invoke a specific animal spirit, or as a marker identifying the sacred nature of the location itself. As with many Indigenous ceremonial landscapes, the cultural significance of the site likely extends beyond its physical construction and is deeply connected to place, memory, and traditional belief systems.



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Picture credit: WWHA Film

CULTURAL PROPERTIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

Martin Jagers
President Board of Directors
Kit Carson House
National Historic Landmark
113 Kit Carson Road
Taos, NM 87571
Sent Via Email: martinjagers@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Jagers:

We are honored to inform you that the Cultural Properties Review Committee of the State of New Mexico (CPRC) has selected you as a recipient for the 2026 Heritage Preservation Award for Organizations. The award is being presented to Kit Carson House, Inc., the Board of Directors, and staff, in recognition of your collective work as

an educational institution and your efforts in completing significant preservation projects at the Kit Carson House and Museum.

The CPRC Heritage Preservation Awards have been presented annually since 1995 and recognize individuals, organizations, and projects that the CPRC values for their contribution to the preservation, interpretation, appreciation, and understanding of New Mexico's cultural heritage.

The 2026 Heritage Preservation Award ceremony will be held on Friday, May 29, 2026, p.m. in the Grand Hall at the National Hispanic Cultural Center. NHCC is located at 1701 4th Street SW in Albuquerque. A reception with refreshments will follow the awards ceremony.

Please contact Irene Rubio at the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) to let her know if you will be attending and if you would like to invite any guests to the ceremony. We would appreciate having names of guests so that we may extend an invitation to them as well. She may be reached
at irene.rubio@dca.nm.gov or 505.827.6320.

On behalf of the CPRC, Congratulations again! We look forward to seeing you on May 29th.

Sincerely,
Ronald Toya
Chairman
Cultural Properties Review Committee

Joe McComb: The First Commercial Buffalo Hunter of the Texas Herd

by

Spring Deleon Wallace

Joseph Seaborn McComb was just twenty years old when he first headed out to hunt the buffalo herd on the Staked Plains. Though a young man, he possessed sound reasoning and was already equipped with three years of prior experience on the Texas Plains, and he became the first man to commercially hunt the Texas herd.[i]
McComb was born on May 12, 1854, in Randolph County, Alabama to Seaborn J. and Mary McComb. At fourteen years of age in 1868, he moved with his parents to Calvert, Texas. They moved again the following year to Hillsboro, Texas, and for the third and final time in 1870 to settle in Eastland County, Texas. The next year in 1871 at seventeen years of age, McComb found a job working for cattle owners Stuart, Strawn & Bartholomew as a cowhand for $15.00 per month and drove a herd of 900 to 1000 older steers up the Chisholm Trail to Caldwell, Kansas, one of the first herds that left Eastland County on a drive.[ii]
Wild steers could be aggressive and formidable from conditioned wildness out on the Texas Plains, and their frequent recovery from the sand hills of Eastland County kept

JOSEPH SEABORN McCOMB

McComb in full earnings of both patience and wages. But he pulled his own weight with youthfully driven determination and reaped the self-achievement of success once the cattle reached Caldwell.

Unable to find further work in Eastland County, McComb rode to Fort Griffin near the Clear Fork of the Brazos. The fort was located on the top of the hill where several hundred soldiers were stationed, and at the bottom of the hill occupied establishment of the Flat which served as a village and trading point for the few settlers dispersed over the area.[iii]

In 1872, McComb found work with a survey party which took him west of Fort Griffin to locate surveys for the Houston and Texas Central Railway (H& T.C.) in the fall of 1872. It was at that time young Joe McComb gained his first realization of the sheer tremendous numbers of buffalo that stretched over the region south toward the main branch of the Concho River. It remained untouched by settlers, wild in untamed glory. “It was on the trip west from Belknap that I saw the most buffalo I ever saw in my life. In fact, we were in buffalo most all the way from the mouth of Miller’s Creek in Shackelford Co. as far as we went. The largest individual herd though was near Kiowa Peak on the Salt Fork of the Brazos northwest of Haskell… (McComb told of his account after Haskell, Texas was founded in 1885) Our party estimated that there were 50,000 head of buffalo in that vast moving mass of buffalo heading south.”[iv]

Such an eyeful of thousands of buffalo impacted his senses, but the striking visual of countless numbers wasn’t all McComb encountered while on that survey assignment. McComb and his survey party with supply wagons approached the Double Mountains and started to ride into a cloud of dust stirred by a moving herd. Given the fact buffalo have poor eyesight but are adequately compensated with a keen sense of smell, the animals caught wind of the scent of man, and spurned alarm of feeling crowded. There was no other thought for them but to escape the vicinity of danger. Countless throngs of panicked buffalo picked up speed and pounded the ground, a thicker flavor of dust kicked up in the stampede. They ran into the wind as buffalo instinctively do, their heads down and tongues out in blind plunge. McComb urgently scanned his surroundings for a possible venue of escape. There was scarce time to think as they bounced and jostled over bumps, dips, and potential washouts, with hard hopes of not stumbling into a prairie dog hole. An order was shouted from somewhere amidst the shroud cloud of dust to bunch the teams and wagons tightly together and draw the party protectively in a cluster. Buffalo thundered past in a deafened rumble and roar wind of movement that shook and shuddered the wagons.

That intense experience with buffalo touched Joe McComb as no other and opened realization to him of an opportunity. It was an unreproducible period in history of buffalo abundance in simultaneous conjunction with completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Iron tracks reached far into the Texas Plains and consequentially carved the Great American bison herd into a northern and southern herd. The railroad opened accessibility to settlers, ranchers, and farmers. It also facilitated an easier way for

hunters to expound upon improvement of personal livelihood and quality of living with buffalo as the commodity and thusly profited to supply buyers for hides to be shipped back east to be commercially tanned.

On Christmas Day in 1874, McComb and two other men, John Jacobs and Joe Poe, assembled an outfit and set out together from Fort Griffin and went "…out the McKenzie Trail and up Paint Creek in Haskell County and established our camp six or seven miles northeast from Haskell at Mockingbird Springs."[v]

A skilled shooter and cognizant of buffalo behavior, McComb fulfilled role of designated shooter with Jacobs and Poe as skinners. Buffalo were plentiful near Mockingbird Springs, an important example for a buffalo hunting party to know what areas claimed enough buffalo worthy to haul an outfit out to. As with many buffalo hunters, McComb was partial to using a Sharps Sporting Rifle which enabled the shooter to load and fire eight times a minute. He hunted on foot, always kept downwind, crept over low ground without detection, and took focused patience to draw a good bead on the leader. The startled buffalo that stood around the dropped leader shuffled about restlessly in place, confused and unsure of what had transpired as there was no scent of danger and grunted to communicate amongst each other in attempted assemblage of another leader. A knowledgeable buffalo hunter knew to shoot on the outside and to shoot those that tried to walk away in prevention of planting a seed of stampede level panic. They needed to be kept milling about in their immediate grazing area known as 'getting a stand,' a technique used from an undetected position to keep the animals standing around.[vi]

McComb then dropped the next buffalo that looked to take a leadership role on the outer throng of the herd. Jacobs and Poe followed with their knife proficiency when McComb finished, skinned out the thick winter hides and then as McComb said "…simply stretched the hide and drove pegs at intervals in the ground, using about 14 pegs to the hide."

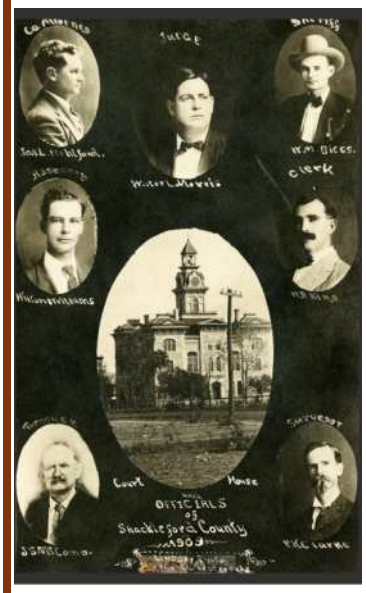
They returned to Ft. Griffin after two months with 700 hides, and McComb still perceived time to obtain good winter hides and decided to go on another hunt that same year. He and Poe left Jacobs with the wagon in Griffin to 'haul the hides,' rigged a wagon to a pony team, as ponies have insulative winter coats, and headed up the Clear Fork of the Brazos toward Fort Phantom Hill, an old abandoned military outpost.

McComb described how on this hunt, "I remember a pretty close call Poe had with a buffalo. I had downed several bulls right together. Poe being only a short distance away, came over and we approached the kill. About 15 feet from a downed bull, he got up and charged straight at Poe; I was behind Poe and shot by him and dropped the buffalo to his feet, Poe shooting him with his pistol as he fell."

They camped within the vicinity of present-day Rotan and stayed until May 1st, Jacobs having already joined them after hauling in the first set of hides, and they took a total of 1300 hides back to Griffin. The accumulated total of 2000 hides between the two hunts sold at Fort Griffin for $1.50 and $2.00 each. "They were the first hides of any consequence marketed at Ft. Griffin…and this was the beginning of the great hide industry out of Ft. Griffin."[vii] Once the hide business grew more organized, the average outfit hunting party "…consisted of four men-one shooter, two skinners, and one man to cook, stretch hides, and take care of camp." [viii]

Aware of such rig proficiency etiquette, McComb saw more competition with more buffalo hunters equipped with upgrades of teams and hide wagons headed out to potential choice hunting grounds and planned his third hunt. “In the fall of 1875 I organized an outfit of my own with three skinners, one of whom was Bob Pitcock, who became an oil man of Ranger, Texas. The other two were Wesley Tarter, who died in the seventies, and Sol Pace who died in Fort Worth. I had a span of mules and wagon on this trip and took along 800 pounds of lead and five kegs of powder, a Sharp Sporting Rifle and my re-loading outfit.”[ix]

They camped on Sweetwater Creek for a stint, killed several hundred buffalo, then moved on to Champion Creek where permanent camp was made and buffalo relatively still untouched. They stayed until April 1st and acquired approximately 2000 hides. “During this entire trip and hunt over 6 months we did not see anyone out of outfit.” Back in Griffin, McComb paid five or six wagons with each individual wagon hitched to a trailer and pulled each by six yokes of oxen to retrieve his hides off the Plains in two separate trips. He organized another hunt with the same outfit and headed in the same direction in the fall of 1876. The numbers of hunters had grown, and so McComb continued past his previous camp to venture farther out and didn’t stop until Morgan Creek to set up camp. He killed 2300 buffalo over the course of the winter, always aware of the wind in his careful advancement and discernment of a lead buffalo, their breath hovered above them in a light frost cloud. But it was also during that hunt on the cold Plains that he heard more frequently the sounds of booming Big Fifties and rifle cracks of 44’s from the east that shattered the air. He was careful not to overheat the barrel as a heated barrel detracted from the bullet’s straight aim, potentially injure a buffalo and much to the chagrin of the hunter, send them into a run. The hide business expanded even more significantly in 1876 as competitive hide buyers decided not to wait for buffalo hunters to bring their hides into Griffin but rolled out on the Plains with empty wagons to camps in competitive measure for greater profit. McComb recalled on that hunt he was paid $1.00 in camp and “What we hauled into Griffin brought $1.50.”



In September of 1877, McComb again took skinners, but with the addition of a Mexican to peg down hides to ensure there were enough men to properly prepare hides for buyers. Green hides were stretched and pegged flesh side down, turned in three to five days afterwards, and turned again until they were completely dry.[x]

Once again, the same trail was taken but a different camp was made at Big Springs. He took with him 1000 pounds of lead and 5 kegs of powder and stayed from September to May, personally killed at least 4900 buffalo, and sold them at $1.00 each.[xi] Hide piles rose higher near camps each day faster than any other year, hunters mindful of sufficiently dried hides that met buyer expectations. 1877 peaked higher than any other year and was recorded as the big kill. His former skinners, “Poe and Jacobs, had an outfit north of us that killed 6300.” [xii] Buffalo had reduced to near extermination, and McComb had his last hunt in 1878. He yielded only 800 hides, but he claimed to have killed a total of about twelve thousand buffalo during his hunts. “I never saw a white [buffalo]…I saw some that looked white in the herds but killed several and they always turned out to be a grizzly color.”[xiii]

Joe McComb, noted buffalo hunter, experienced five hunts in five years from 1874-1878. It was the ultimate period in western history of buffalo bounty on the Staked Plains, a time of change he witnessed as in his lifetime from wild frontier to inevitable growth. He went back to his childhood home in Hill County to find that special girl he had known as a kid, Nancy Elizabeth (Betty) Hale, and they were married on June 29, 1879. They moved to Albany in 1881 and stayed. McComb served several terms as treasurer of Shackleford County starting in 1894. He then later went into the retail business and continued in it until his death March 21, 1935.[xiv]
He was revered as an important figure in the pioneer history of Albany and Shackelford County, filled with important wealth of remembrances, knowledge, and detailed facts pertaining to the local area. He was known to everyone as "'Uncle Joe' a "gentle, fun-loving man."[xv]

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[i] Ollie E. Clark, *McComb, "Joseph Seaborn,"* Handbook of Texas Online, accessed August 13, 2025 https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mccomb-joseph-seaborn.
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Now & Then, "*Joseph McComb: Buffalo Hunter,"* Shackelford County 1976 Magazine
[iv] Ibid
[v] Ibid
[vi] Richard Irving Dodge, "*Hunting Grounds of the Great West"*
[vii] Texas State Historical Association. "*First Commercial Buffalo Hunt in Texas"* https://www.tshaonline.org/texas-day-by-day/entry/1130
[viii] Dodge
[ix] Now & Then
[x] David Vigness, "*Buffalo Hunting,"* Handbook of Texas Online. https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/buffalo-hunting.
[xi] Now & Then
[xii] Ollie
[xiii] "*First Commercial Buffalo"*
[xiv] Ollie
[xv] Mary Whatley Clarke. *"Uncle Joe McComb."* Cattleman Magazine, 1974.

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"On your way home from the Roundup, be sure to stop by the newly opened Billy the Kid Museum in Fort Sumner."

Fort Sumner–DeBaca County Chamber
of Commerce 3501 Billy the Kid Dr.
Fort Sumner, NM 88119

Fort Sumner Heritage Center Announces Grand Opening Featuring Two Major New Exhibits Celebrating Local and Western History

FORT SUMNER, NM — July 18, 2026 — History will come alive in spectacular fashion as the **Fort Sumner Heritage Center** celebrates its grand opening on **Saturday, July 18**, at the Fort Sumner–DeBaca County Chamber of Commerce, 3501 Billy the Kid Drive.

This landmark event unveils two permanent exhibits: **"At the Crossroads of History,"** a sweeping exploration of DeBaca County's rich and layered past, and **"Billy the Kid: Beyond the Myth,"** a bold new exhibition dedicated to the life, legend, and final chapter of one of America's most enduring frontier figures.

The Heritage Center represents a multi-year collaboration between the **City of Fort Sumner**, the **State of New Mexico**, the **Fort Sumner–DeBaca County Chamber of Commerce**, and **Bad Hoss Ventures**—a partnership driven by a shared commitment to preserving and elevating the region's unique heritage.

"At the Crossroads of History"

A Journey Through DeBaca County

This dynamic exhibit invites visitors to explore the cultural crossroads that shaped DeBaca County—from Indigenous communities and Spanish colonial influence to frontier settlement, ranching traditions, and the evolution of Fort Sumner itself. Guests will discover how this small but mighty corner of New Mexico played an outsized role in the broader American West.

"Billy the Kid: Beyond the Myth"

The Life, Legend, and Last Stand of an American Legend

For the first time ever, a comprehensive museum exhibit devoted exclusively to the life of

Billy the Kid will be open to the public at the very place where he met his fate and now lies buried—just steps from the Fort Sumner Cemetery.

“Billy the Kid: Beyond the Myth” goes beyond dime novel exaggerations and Hollywood portrayals to present a deeply researched, visually stunning examination of the outlaw’s short but unforgettable life. The exhibit features:

- Original artwork by renowned Western artist and *True West Magazine* editor **Bob Boze Bell**, whose vivid interpretations of the Old West have captivated audiences nationwide.
- A truly one-of-a-kind sculpture of Billy the Kid lying in repose, created exclusively for this exhibit by legendary Western sculptor **Buckeye Blake**.