

## William S. Hart Museum Volunteer Newsletter

Monthly

September 2018

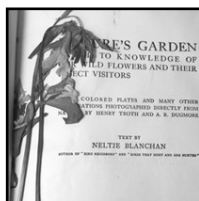


### Also In This Issue:



2

The Range Rider



3

My Summer at the  
Hart Museum



4

Coordinator's  
Column



5

Another Use for  
Your Pierce Arrow

# A Range Rider

By John P. Smith, Jr.



In the foyer of the William S. Hart Museum is a bronze sculpture of Bill Hart and his pinto pony Fritz, called *A Range Rider of the Yellowstone*. Artist Charles Cristadoro was commissioned by Hart to produce this working model. The final, life-sized statue is located in Billings, Montana.

Billings was not the destination Hart had envisioned for *A Range Rider*. According to Hart, he had wanted it placed, “on some lonely spot on the rim of the Grand Canyon of Arizona far away from the crowds and strife of life.”

Hart felt a deep connection to the Grand Canyon. Scenes from *The Bargain*, Hart’s first starring film, had been filmed there, and he believed that the Grand Canyon was, “a religion symbolically taught.”

It may seem that a placement at the Grand Canyon was a bit self-aggrandizing for Hart, however, Hart saw the statue as a symbol, writing, “Of course you understand my friend, while the horse is my horse and the man is myself, the idea is not to perpetuate life portraits of either one of us. The aim is to make a symbolic group of the west – a Cowman of the West and his horse, who while the horse nibbles at a bit of bunch grass His Boss - *The Range Rider* - quietly rolls himself a cigarette and watching those flaming colors in the light of the setting sun – feels the sublimity of that fantastic work of God – that is covered by the sky of the Southwest – a million miles away from civilization’s school.”

Unfortunately, Hart’s vision was not to be. In a letter, dated September 15, 1926, the Director of the National Park Service said that it would literally take an Act of Congress to place Hart’s, or anyone else’s statue in a National Park. The purpose of the National Parks was to “conserve the scenery and natural and historic objects therein, by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” While Hart’s offer was appreciated, it could not be accepted. Other people might want statues or memorials using Hart’s *A Range Rider* as a precedent. Imagine the rim of the Grand Canyon with statues of Tom Mix, John Wayne, or Clint Eastwood. Hollywood stars are fleeting: the Grand Canyon is timeless.

In 1926, Hart attended the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Little Big Horn. Pleased by the generous reception he received from the citizens of Billings, Montana during the event, he chose to gift *A Range Rider* to the city. Citizens, ecstatic with Hart’s gesture, chose the 1927 Independence Day weekend celebration for the statue’s unveiling. Freshman English students in Eastern Montana were encouraged to read Fritz’s book, *Told Under a White Oak Tree* and write an essay about Hart’s character for a competition. Two boys and two girls won prizes: first prize received \$50 and second received \$25. All four students were invited to attend the unveiling ceremony. Fritz was invited as well, however, Hart replied that Fritz had gotten “too fat and sassy,” and Hart might have to ride in the baggage car to calm him down. Fritz stayed home.

Years later, in 1938, a flood caused a rock fall and the *Range Rider* statue had to be moved farther west and more inland. The statue is still placed on top of the Rimrocks overlooking Yellowstone Valley, east of the Yellowstone County Museum and at the entrance to the Billings Logan International Airport.

Hart’s life-sized statue, now called, *A Range Rider of the Yellowstone*, stands still looking down at the Yellowstone Valley 91 years later.



A Range Rider, July 4, 1927

# My Summer at the William S. Hart Museum

Over seventy years have passed since silent film star, William S. Hart passed away, but even after his death, new discoveries about his life and career continue to surface. The most recent discoveries have been made this summer, hidden between the pages of Hart's books.

This summer, I was given the incredible opportunity to complete an internship at the William S. Hart Museum, conducting research into Hart's personal book collection. The project consisted of cataloging and researching the books in the collection, along with documenting interesting findings or items found within the books. Imagine if someone were to look at the types of books you collect in your home. What would those books tell us about your life or interests? What secrets would they hold?

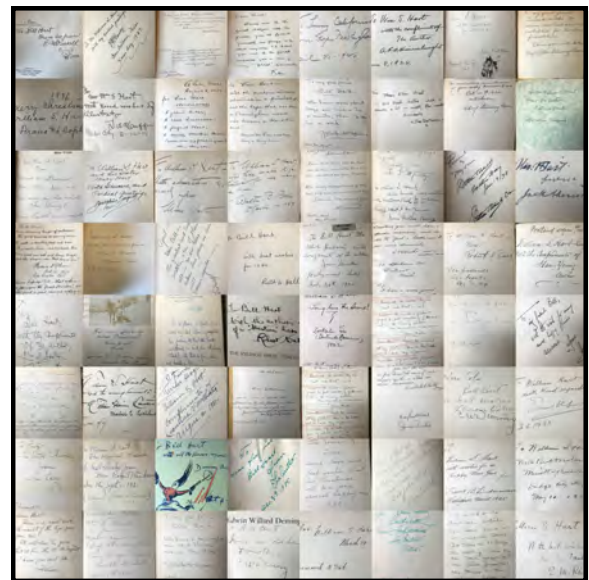
In total, I cataloged over 1,200 books in his collection, and out of those, 335 inscriptions had been written in the books by various authors, friends, or fans. Apart from inscriptions, I also discovered items hidden within the pages of the books, including photographs, a real Iris flower, handwritten notes, letters, and even a newspaper from 1925. The books tell a story about the life and history of William S. Hart, a man who had a profound impact on the silent film industry and on the town of Newhall. He may no longer be alive, but the items in his home still have a story to tell. The books give us insight into the personal lives of both Bill and his sister, Mary Ellen.

Included in his book collection are books that his sister Mary Ellen, who also lived with him, owned. It was easy to predict the type of books that Hart collected, since we know he had a love for the West and Native Americans. Unsurprisingly, these type of books took up most of his collection, but what intrigued me the most were Mary Ellen's books. In her room, I discovered astrology books, cookbooks, French language books, and books on gardening. As we already know a lot about her famous brother's interests, it was fascinating to discover what interested his sister. One of the most personal books in

the collection was a cookbook that had been entirely put together by Mary Ellen. She had taken the time to cut out each individual recipe and glue them into this book, organizing the recipes by different categories. The book, however, remains unfinished as there are loose recipes placed in envelopes that never made it onto the pages.

I have enjoyed this internship so much that I decided to become a volunteer at the William S. Hart Museum once the internship concludes, continuing to share my love of history. I am excited to see what findings we may discover next and what else we can learn about the life of this famous western actor.

Jenny Myer, 2018 Getty Intern



Will Rogers and Charlie Russell

William S. Hart and Charlie Russell

William S. Hart and Will Rogers

Will Rogers and Charlie Russell, William S. Hart and Charlie Russell, William S. Hart and Will Rogers. Say that quickly enough and it's easy to get it wrong. I'm sure all of us know who is who, but we received feedback from a guest who was certain she heard someone mix this up and identify the photos incorrectly. So we just want to pass along the suggestion that we not speak too quickly, and be clear as to what photo we are pointing to if we talk about these great photos at the end of our tours. THANKS!

# UPCOMING EVENTS



## HART MUSEUM OPEN HOUSE: *Hart Park's 60th Birthday and Games*

Saturday, September 22  
11am to 4pm

William S. Hart Park and Museum officially opened to the public in 1958. For sixty years, the public has been able to enjoy the park grounds and free tours of his former house, all thanks to Hart's generosity. The spaces both continue to tell the story of Bill Hart and all of his life adventures. Join us in celebrating the 60th anniversary of Hart Park and Museum with fun games and crafts that were popular when Bill Hart lived in this house.

### UV Film Installation

Just want to let everyone know that we are planning to redo the UV film on the windows of the Mansion and the Ranch House. We want to wait until the busy summer season is over, and are still figuring out the best dates, since the process may require us to close the museum for a few days. We will keep you all informed.



### SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, October 13 - 6pm to 8pm

BYO picnic dinner to enjoy in the back yard, and then settle in for a screening on Mary Ellen's Sun Deck. Popcorn and movie candy provided.

Movie TBD - suggestions welcome!

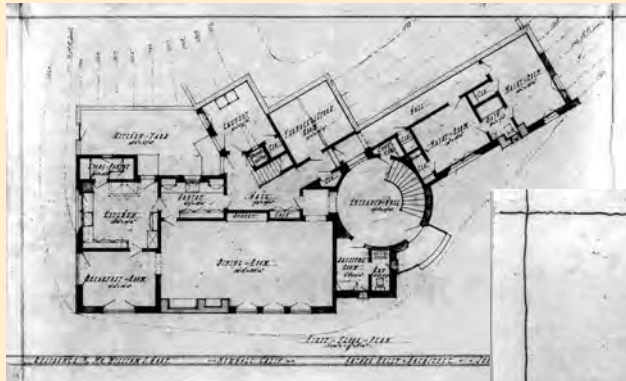
# COORDINATOR'S COLUMN

After nearly 200 applications, fifteen interviews, and four call back interviews, we are delighted to welcome Magdalynne Christakis as the Hart's new Education and Volunteer Coordinator. She starts Tuesday, September 4.



She brings with her ten years of experience working in museum education as a volunteer, lesson facilitator, tour guide and assistant program coordinator. This includes time at the Field Museum in Chicago, Lincoln Park Zoo and work at the Autry as a part-time museum teacher facilitating off-site lessons for 3rd, 4th and 5th graders. The lesson topics included Western Art, Cowboys in Hollywood vs. History, and the natural resources of the Tongva. Another item on her resume that I'm excited to look at bringing to the Hart is her experience with scout badge programs.

And that is Oscar, her pet bearded dragon, with her in the photo.



### ARCHITECTURAL PLANS

We recently had some of the architectural plans for the Hart mansion scanned, and will be having some mounted on foam core for use during our tours. We think you'll find them interesting and helpful.

You can also see that originally there was an idea of a second story to the watchtower! I'm kind of sorry they didn't build it that way.

## Another Use for Your Pierce Arrow

A real eye-catcher to visitors entering the Living Room in the Hart mansion, the eucalyptus log carved by Dee Flagg is a stunning piece of art.

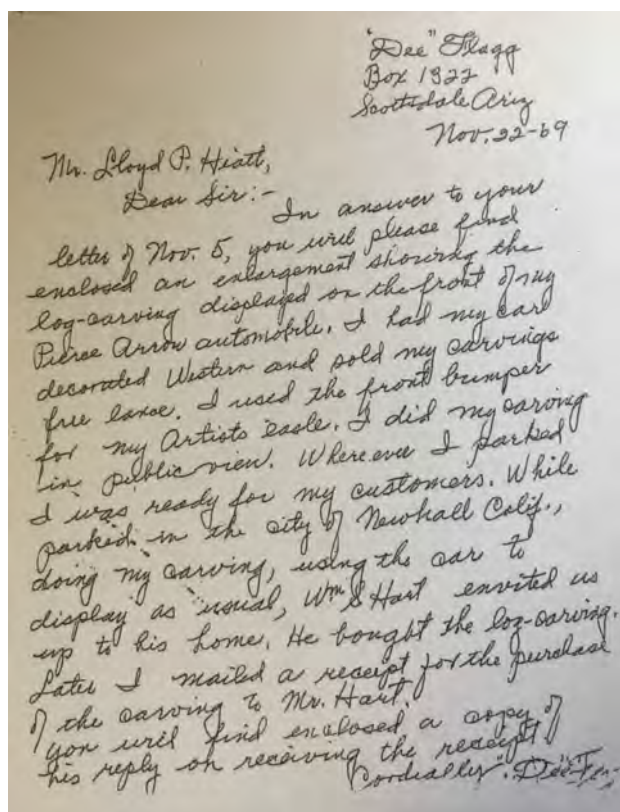
His love of wood carving began early, as he was growing up in Great Falls, Montana, creating Indians and soldiers out of the ends of lumber. His father had been a Pony Express rider! And it was his father that trained Dee to use his memory for visual images, which leads to some of the incredible detail found in his work.

What Dee appears to be most known for are his life-like figures – less than a foot tall – of blacksmiths, cowboys, wheelwrights, patent medicine sellers, Indians and frontier artists. When alive, he was one of them himself, with a black mustache, a wide sombrero, a leather vest adorned with conchos.

Although many are awed by his attention to detail, the stack of money and coins on the table by the patent medicine seller, or the old hound dog gnawing on a gigantic bone, he was aware that over emphasizing those details could distract the viewer from the main action. “I get the emphasis first,” Flagg said. “Then with my pocket knife, I start peeling the wood like an apple. When the details seem to jell in the right relationship, I feel good. Sometimes I get so involved I work from 7am to midnight without a break to eat. Then I’m astonished at how big a pile of chips has built up around my feet.”

However, it is one of his bas-relief pieces that we have here at the Hart. As you can see below in a letter to Lloyd Hiatt, a Hart Park employee, dated November 22, 1969, Dee Flagg explains, “...find enclosed an enlargement showing the log carving displayed on the front of my Pierce Arrow automobile...**I used the front bumper for my artists easel. I did my carving in public view.** Wherever I parked I was ready for my customers. While parked in the city of Newhall, California, doing my carving, using the car to display as usual, Wm. S. Hart invited us up to his home. He bought the log carving.”

So to clarify what we sometimes hear in the museum, and which has been in previous training manuals, Dee Flagg **did not drive around with the log as the bumper of his car**. Rather, he would take whatever piece he was working on and balance it on his car’s bumper, as a way to support it while he would carve so people could watch him work. Those of us who have had to move this log understand that it would not make sense to attach something this heavy on the bumper of your car, and why would you risk someone damaging your hard work? Don’t we all enjoy seeing artists working in person? Dee knew this, and that was what Hart likely saw that day in Newhall when he fell in love with the piece we get to share with our visitors.



Dee Flagg  
Box 1822  
Scottsdale Ariz  
Nov. 22-69

Mr. Lloyd P. Hiatt,  
Dear Sir:-

In answer to your letter of Nov. 5, you will please find enclosed an enlargement showing the log-carving displayed on the front of my Pierce Arrow automobile. I had my car decorated Western and sold my carvings free base. I used the front bumper for my Artists easel. I did my carving in public view. Wherever I parked I was ready for my customers. While parked in the city of Newhall Calif., doing my carving, using the car to display as usual, Wm. S. Hart invited us up to his home. He bought the log-carving. Later I mailed a receipt for the purchase of the carving to Mr. Hart.

You will find enclosed a copy of his reply on receiving the receipt.

Cordially, Dee Flagg

