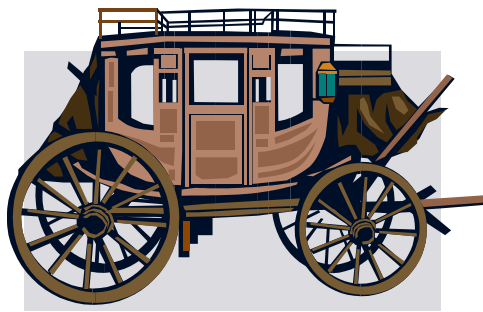


RECOLLECTIONS



JACK D. RITTENHOUSE

Boy Scout
Magician
Hobo
Oil Industry Publicist
Publisher (Stage Coach Press)
UNM Press Editor
Historian of New Mexico
Rare Book Dealer

By
**JACK DEVERE
RITTENHOUSE**
(1912 –1991)
Albuquerque, New Mexico

From his unpublished materials and
Annual Christmas newsletters
1975 through 1987

Composited, Illustrated, and Edited By Harry Briley

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Master Structure

Each chapter is a stand-alone document with a separate table of contents. These mostly chronological memoirs in three sections start by recollections that set the stage for the topical chapters which follow.

Chapters:

1. Life in the Mid-West Twenties
 2. Boy Scouts
 3. College Years
 4. Magician

5. Settling Down on Highway 66
 6. Wander Year
 7. A Year in the California State Guard
 8. Advertising
 9. Books and I
 10. Stagecoach Press

- 11. Albuquerque Roots**
 - 12. UNM Press**
 - 13. Historian**
 - 14. Bookman in London/Paris 1977**
 - 15. Antiquarian Bookman**
 - 16. The West is Wider than You Think**
 - 17. Bookman in Spain 1989**

18. Closing Shop

Chapter 13 – Historian

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CHAPTER 13 – HISTORIAN

Books

I started writing *Maverick Tales* [1969-1970] and *The Santa Fe Trail: A Historical Bibliography* [1970].

The Santa Fe Trail book was published in September 1971. It won an award as "the best reference book on the Southwest published in 1971" awarded by the Border Regional Library Association (BRLA). It was almost sold out, with only about 75 copies left in stock by the end of 1973.

In that September, I sold my collection of about 200 Santa Fe Trail items to Ted Bonnell, an Alamogordo banker, for \$2,000. The money assured Susan's first year at [New Mexico Tech in] Socorro and \$500 of it paid a back debt for Douglas' residential care.

When delivering the books to Bonnell, Charlotte, I, and Anne took the camper trailer to Alamogordo and then on down to El Paso and Juarez on November 6 to receive the BRLA award, returning by way of Winston and Magdalena.

In 1986, I made a talk at the [founding] *Santa Fe Trail Association* meeting in Trinidad, Colorado, on "*The Literature of the Santa Fe Trail*". It was published in 1987 as *The Santa Fe Trail: New Perspectives*, issued in paperback by the *Colorado Historical Society*.

In 1987, I received an award from the newly formed *Santa Fe Trail Association* for books I had written and published about the Santa Fe Trail. To receive that award in Hutchinson, Kansas, I drove 600 miles, taking one day each way.

Historian

My daytime work life in university publishing, lecturing, and library engagements appears in the chapter *University of New Mexico*

I had an article on Santa Fe published in *American West*, September 1971; an article on the Santa Fe Trail in *The New Mexico Journal for the Social Studies*, Volume V, No. 2, 1971; and wrote a part of the volume *Historic Preservation: A Plan for New Mexico* published by the State Planning Office, 1971.

My term as a member of the Cultural Properties Review Committee, under governors Cargo and King, ended on June 30, 1971. Because [Roger Shugg], director of the UNM Press, objected to employees' participation in civic affairs, I asked to be not renewed on that committee, whose functions dealt with historic sites.

Instead, I was named a member of a new commission to plan observance of the 60th anniversary of Statehood of New Mexico, but unable to contribute significantly to the commission's work, although I spoke on one or two occasions to local groups.

In June 1971, I flew to Salt Lake City and drove up to Ogden, Utah, where I gave a talk at Utah State University on graphic arts. They paid all expenses.

I ended my two two-year terms as president of the *Historical Society of New Mexico*, on November 16, the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Santa Fe Trail to regular commerce. The fall had a flurry of other speaking engagements for me but I had no activity by mid-November and glad to be relieved [and settle into UNM Press work].

In April 1974, I heard that the *American Association for State and Local History* (AASLH) was planning to publish a set of books related to the forthcoming national Bicentennial, with one book on each of the 50 states plus one for D.C.

I put in my application at once, but by the end of 1974 only 15 states were selected—most of them from well-known authors such as Larry Powell for Arizona and David Lavender for California. [David's books *Land of Giants: The Drive to the Pacific Northwest 1750-1950*, 1958, Doubleday and a signed copy of *California: A Bicentennial History*, 1976, AASLH are in the Briley home.]. No news came on [the selected author for] New Mexico

In 1977, I received another award from the *Border Regional Library Association* (or Conference) [BRLA] for work done in establishing the Zia series of paperback reprints [with UNM Press] of Western literary classics. In March, David and Mildren Lavender (the above author) spent a day with us in Albuquerque and pumped me for material on the Southwest.

Zane Wood, oil-field friend of Jack, in 10/1999 (transcribed)

I started working in the oil / gas field and related jobs in 1950. I made a career of it in Farmington and read Jack's articles in the Baroid News. I was amazed at

how much he absorbed the oil field language, such as a “Beaver Slide”. Only oil people spoke that lingo. He certainly did his homework. I would drive down to Albuquerque and talk for three or four hours with him. He knew enough about many things to hold my interest. Charlotte affirmed that while his stories about the Yukon in Baroid News came from secondary sources, his writing sounded so authoritative that the Canadian government asked Jack for the rights to publish!

Zane Wood followed up my inquiry in 2017.

While I was at the NMSU Library archives in Las Cruces [back in 1999] going through their boxes of Rittenhouse items [donated by Charlotte], I found lots of great stuff. Jack did a story on the Gaso-gene which was one of the first Seltzer-Siphon type bottles. I got the permission from the Library and Charlotte to send [the story] to a bottle collectors magazine for publication, which they did. I collect old Hutchinson type soda bottles and a few Seltzer bottles.

By the way, a “Beaver Slide” is the steel plate that goes from the catwalk on the ground and angles upward to hook on the edge of the floor where the driller, roughnecks and all the work takes place. It is long enough to reach the floor and its length depends on how high the substructure is above the ground. It is difficult to comprehend without seeing it in person or having a picture in front of you.

Western History Association

I was greatly enriched by my work and membership in the *Western History Association* and attended every [Conference in October] from 1961 until at least 1987 (at age 75), with the exception of the 1973 meeting. Two weeks before that 1973 session, I fell down the steep flight of stairs at home breaking my right wrist and left shoulder blade.

In those years, we held conferences in Santa Fe, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Denver, Helena, Phoenix, San Francisco, San Diego, Salt Lake City, Portland, Rapid City, El Paso, and at Yale University, to name the most memorable.

In 1971, I served as local arrangements chair for the 1971 national conference. It was a great success and I worked like a sled dog.

I was appointed two years before. "Appointed" is a loose term; I was simply told to do it. At least five years previously, the History Department asked the University [of New Mexico] to extend a formal invitation that the 1971 meeting be held in Albuquerque. The University agreed and the Association accepted. No one ever troubled to see if the city of Albuquerque could actually accommodate a meeting of this size and type, which it could not. The University told the History Department to take care of the arrangements. The History Department passed the task on to Roger Shugg, and he laid the job on me.

The requirements of the meeting were:

- a hotel (or adjacent hotels) with 350 rooms
- a display area for forty tables each three by six or eight feet for books
- a main meeting room that seated 800
- three lecture rooms for separate sessions held simultaneously
- a banquet room that held up to 700 for the main banquet

In 1970 when making the final arrangements for the 1971 conference, there was no place in Albuquerque that met these requirements, nor in any adjacent group of places. Two years later, there were such places.

Therefore, we held the meeting in Santa Fe. I booked every room at the famous La Fonda and in the one other downtown hotel, plus all available rooms in all motels within the city. The center of activity was at La Fonda on the plaza. For various sessions, we used an auditorium near the Museum [of New Mexico], and we even used the city's council chambers [of Santa Fe]. For the big banquet, we used a former gymnasium at the College of Santa Fe, and dinner was served to six hundred people, catered by Bill Harvey, a descendant of Fred Harvey of railroad fame.

We did some things never done before or since. The sessions began with registration at Wednesday noon. By Thursday morning, each person attending received a printed directory of all people attending with their motel or hotel, so people could locate friends. We arranged for a special identification card that allowed registrants to cash personal checks at a local bank. We kept the book displays open from breakfast to late evening.

Chapter 13 – Historian

All of this was my responsibility: seeing that all people had rooms; that all speakers reached their proper conference room on time; that tickets were collected for meals; that all receipts were handled properly, and all bills paid. I had superb help from many volunteers and everything went well. The conference actually produced a small surplus. At the business session, I was given an ovation. It had taken many hundreds of hours of work, nearly all of it on my own time, not UNM "company time."

In October 1972, I drove to the *Western History Association* conference at Yale, where I gave a talk on printing design. On this trip, I spent three days in New York and visited George and Frances Balch [Charlotte's sister] in Providence one evening and stopped off in Chicago to see my son David, who had remarried in 1971.

[Because of these annual Conferences,] I came to know personally most of the truly great Western historians: Ray Allen Billington, LeRoy Hafen, John Francis Bannon, Dale Morgan, Wallace Stegner, Arthur Woodward, and scores of others.

I came to know the great university librarians: Archibald Hanna, E.L. DeGolyer, Jr., Everett Cooley, Gene Gressley, Jim Phillips, David Laird, and a host of similar greats. All of this later proved most valuable when I began my rare book business.