



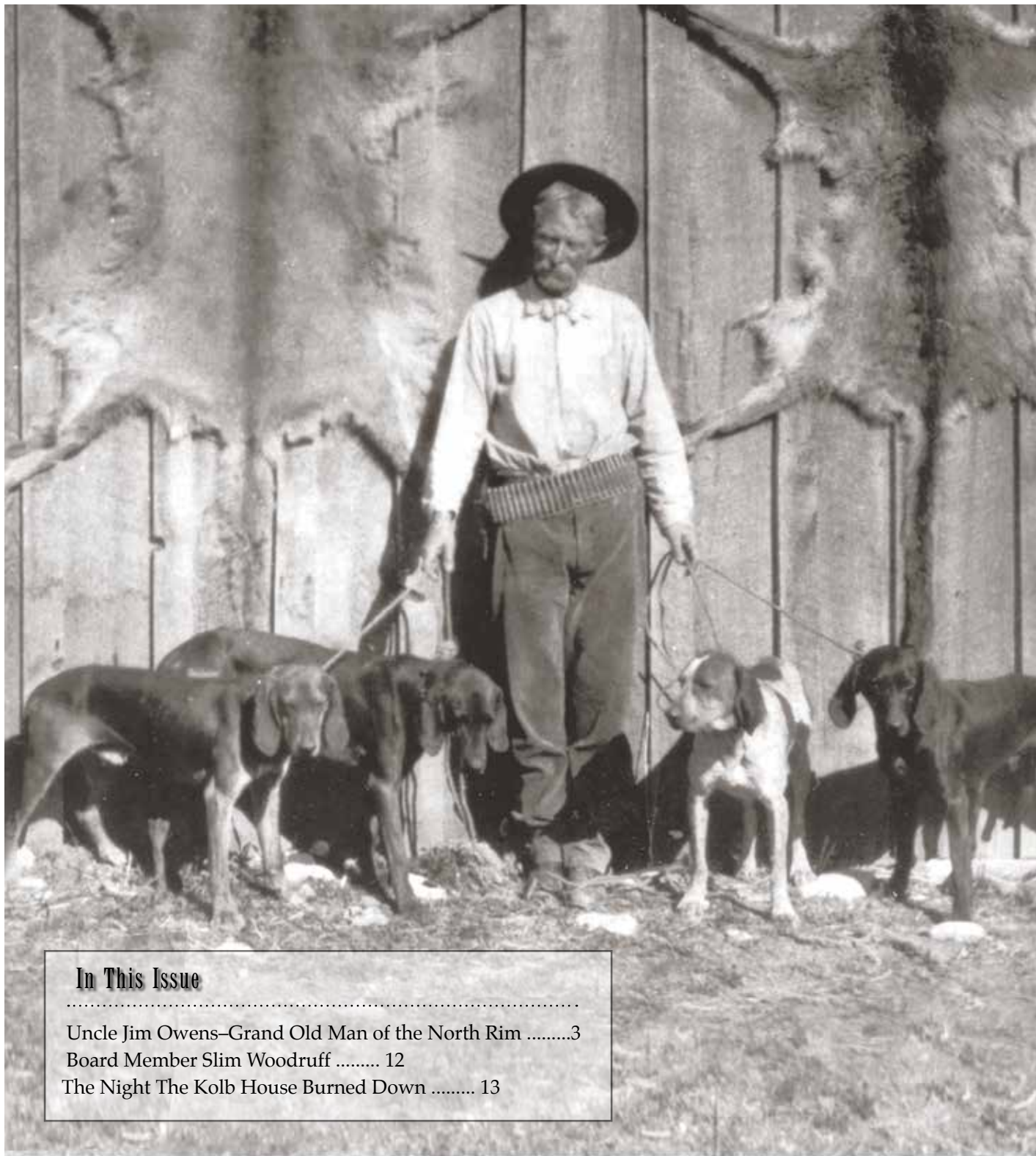
# The Ol' Pioneer

The Magazine of the Grand Canyon Historical Society

Volume 28 : Number 2

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Spring 2017



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# President's Letter

Another winter has passed at Grand Canyon and a warm spring greets us here on the southern Colorado Plateau. It has already been in the 70s here in Flagstaff in the first half of March! Although there were a few big winter storms, it looks like the area will once again fall short of our 30-year average for snowfall amounts. The trend now is that the snow starts later in the fall and quits earlier in the spring. We can now count on rain in November/early December and March. This might be good for outdoor enthusiasts but spells trouble for the regional aquifer. That is why Grand Canyon National Park is conducting many detailed studies about how the aquifer works here. We hope to report on their findings soon.

In this edition of *The Ol' Pioneer* you'll find an interesting backstory to one of Grand Canyon's most colorful characters, Uncle Jim Owens. The article comes to you courtesy of GCHS Board member Dick Brown, who will also present his research on this topic at the joint Arizona/New Mexico Historical Symposium, to be held in Flagstaff, Arizona, April 20-23. As you will learn in this article, Owens came of age in the glory days of the Old West and thus met and interacted with many famous persons such as Colonel Charles Goodnight, John Chisum, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid. Owens lived long enough to make history in the West's sunset years, guiding former President Teddy Roosevelt on a cougar hunt on the North Rim, establishing the buffalo herd in House Rock Valley with help from none other than Buffalo Bill Cody, and meeting Arizona's only official Territorial Historian, Sharlot Hall. We are pleased to offer our members an article of this caliber and hope you like it.

Myself and Bryan Brown penned a piece called, "The Night the Kolb House Burned Down." This is about a largely forgotten house fire in Pinyon Park that occurred in February 1979. This story follows other recent articles that we like to call Personal Remembrances, which are first hand accounts of more recent events at Grand Canyon. You might remember Keith Green's article on his first hike into the Grand Canyon (*OP* vol. 26, no. 1) and Bryan Brown's hike into a Grand Canyon cave (*OP* vol. 27, no. 3). We encourage our members who lived here from the 1960s onwards to contribute their Personal Remembrances of little known historic events. These do not have to be earth-shattering or epic events that generate newspaper articles – just items of a personal nature that would help to round out the experience of living, hiking or river running in the Grand Canyon. We know many of you do not yet think of yourselves as "old enough" to have witnessed history but the remarkable truth is, "you are!" And we want to hear your stories.

This issue of *The Ol' Pioneer* also introduces another of one our Board members, Slim Woodruff. We hope you enjoy these vignettes that introduce those who contribute their time and energies in guiding this organization. As I mentioned to you in the last President's Letter, we would love to have you serve on our Board. We will have a number of openings soon for the 2018-2020 term. The Grand Canyon has given so much to all of us. Now, you can give a little back to it!

Happy spring!

Wayne Ranney  
President

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Cover: Uncle Jim Owens with four of his hunting hounds against a backdrop of lion skins.  
GRCA 12093

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The Historical Society was established in July 1984 as a non-profit corporation to develop and promote appreciation, understanding and education of the earlier history of the inhabitants and important events of the Grand Canyon.

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Submission deadlines: January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Submit photos and stories to the editor of *The Ol' Pioneer* at: [info@marywilliamsdesign.com](mailto:info@marywilliamsdesign.com) Contact for mailing address (928) 779-3377. Please submit written articles and photos electronically on CD or via email if possible. You may mail photos for scanning if needed.

Submissions to *The Bulletin* should be sent to Karen Greig, [kgreig@yahoo.com](mailto:kgreig@yahoo.com)

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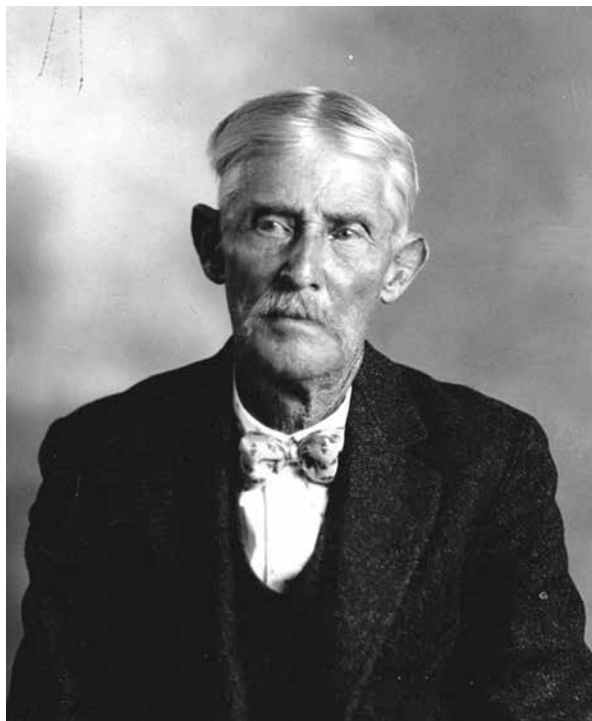
# Uncle Jim Owens — Grand Old Man of the North Rim

by Dick Brown

James T. Owens was born near San Antonio, Texas, probably in the late 1840s.<sup>1</sup> Jimmy's father died when he was a young boy. His mother remarried but his stepfather did not treat him well so at age 11 Jimmy ran away from home.<sup>2</sup> He went to work on various Texas ranches and cattle drives, thus beginning a 45-year career on the trail as cowboy and frontiersman. It was a shameful time in our nation's history when hide-hunters were decimating the American bison. Within earshot of their blazing guns, Jim knew the great herds would soon be gone. He once remarked to the daughter of a fellow cattleman, "I believe I have seen as many as a million buffalo on the plains at one time."<sup>3</sup> But soon the million would be reduced to thousands, then only hundreds.

## COWBOY YEARS IN TEXAS

In June 1866, at the young age of 17, Jim joined a pioneering cattle drive led by Colonel Charles Goodnight, legendary cattle baron and trailblazer of the Old West, when Goodnight and his mentor Oliver Loving set out from Fort Belknap, Texas on the Brazos River with 2,000 longhorns. Jim was one of 16 cowhands<sup>4</sup> driving cattle across the scrubby prairie. To avoid Comanche Country, the outfit followed an old southern route, used by the stagecoaches of the Butterfield-Overland Mail, with one 90-mile barren waterless stretch known as Llano Estacado (staked plains) from the headwaters of the Concho River in West Texas to the Pecos River in New Mexico Territory, then followed the Pecos upstream to Fort Sumner. With John Chisum, the trail was extended well into Colorado. It became known



James T. Owens, 1927, Alderson Studio, Clarendon, Texas, courtesy Addie Lu Vaughan

as the famous Goodnight-Loving Trail and was used many times before Charlie Goodnight consolidated operations at his Palo Duro Canyon ranch, at the headwaters of the Red River, in the Texas Panhandle in 1876. Jim actually managed the Goodnight Ranch for a time in the 1880s, then went on to manage Leigh Dyer's Mulberry Creek ranch three miles west of Goodnight, Texas.<sup>5</sup>

Over the years, Jim worked for many ranches and open range cattle drives in Texas and in the Indian Territory that became Oklahoma, but his life changed when he and Charles Jesse "Buffalo" Jones crossed paths. As Jim tells the story, "I was at the Goodnight Ranch when Buffalo Jones came down from Garden City, Kansas in 1897 or 1898 and announced that he wanted to buy a couple of buffalo to drive a sled for exhibition purposes. I helped Jones break those buffalo. We got them gentle enough to drive, if you want to call it that. They were yoked to a sled that had a windlass for controlling the team. Jones would stop the team by

giving the windlass a few cranks which would jerk the buffaloes to their knees. To start them again, he would slack the rope. It was as simple as that. Jones' show drew enormous crowds at all Panhandle towns. But the show ended when it got to Fort Worth, where the Buffaloes went mad from the heat and died."<sup>6</sup>

During his cowboy days, Jim met other Old West legends, including Sheriff Pat Garrett, mountain man Kit Carson, the flamboyant showman "Buffalo" Bill Cody, the Arizona territorial historian Sharlot Hall, and the celebrated outlaw Henry McCarty, aka Billy the Kid,<sup>7</sup> plus some members of the notorious Jesse James gang.<sup>8</sup> He described the Kid as being "one of the finest fellows to be with I have ever seen. The Kid was forced into lots of killings. It must be remembered that there was some pretty hard hombres in them days and Billy was a marked man. Pat Garrett, the man who killed him, wasn't no angel hisself."<sup>9</sup> Jim may also have been forced into some deadly gunplay. It has been reported that in a saloon fight in Indian Territory, Jim had to kill a man in self-defense. He was later acquitted.

It has been said that Jim Owens was a spiritual descendent of Daniel Boone and the men of the long rifle – one of the last of the free-spirited wilderness hunters. This sturdy five-foot-six pioneer had survived life on the rugged frontier and although so many like him were boisterous, cocky and rough, Jim was soft-spoken, gentle and reserved. He was a quiet, kind-hearted, unassuming man, a lifelong bachelor who loved kids – consequently, the "Uncle" title.<sup>10</sup> If he could not speak well of one, he would not speak of him at all.<sup>11</sup> His patience for men and animals was endless; only cruelty or cowardice roused his wrath.

## LAND OF STEAMING GEYSERS

Buffalo Bill, who had visited the Grand Canyon in November 1892 with a British party interested in establishing hunting lodges on the North Rim, once commented to Buffalo Jones that the grasslands of the Kaibab Plateau might be suitable for raising buffalo. Jones had been appointed Yellowstone game warden by President Theodore Roosevelt in July 1902. His primary missions were to solve the problem of bears harassing tourists and to manage the buffalo herd. Owens accompanied Jones to Yellowstone and served as the buffalo keeper. For three days in 1904, the two buffalo wranglers hunted on a Wyoming ranch with the hard-

riding Teddy Roosevelt<sup>12</sup> who had recently visited the Grand Canyon and suggested they try hunting cougars on the North Rim.<sup>13</sup> Having successfully rebuilt the Yellowstone buffalo herd, Jones and Owens were ready for new challenges. In 1905, Jones resigned as game warden, recommended Jim Owens as his temporary replacement, and headed for Grand Canyon country. Owens followed in 1906. That was the year when he and Jones proposed a Grand Canyon buffalo refuge on the Kaibab Plateau to President Roosevelt. In keeping with his desire to boost his image as a wildlife conservationist, the president issued a proclamation on November 28, 1906, setting aside part of the Grand Canyon Forest

Reserve north of the Colorado River as the Grand Canyon Game Preserve. Jones and Owens imported buffalo from Yellowstone National Park and the Goodnight Ranch. The buffalo were trail-herded, with great difficulty, 150 miles from the railhead at Lund, Utah, to House Rock Valley<sup>14</sup> just below the Kaibab Plateau. While Jones experimented with cross-breeding cattle and buffalo, Owens hired out to stockmen on the Kaibab to hunt mountain lions which were decimating their cattle. There were times when he claimed to have earned \$500 in a single day of hunting, very good pay compared to the \$75 per month that he had been earning as the Yellowstone buffalo keeper.



Uncle Jim, on right, with fellow hunter, having just killed a young mountain lion in 1913, GRCA 5279

## LIVING ON THE EDGE

To North Rim settlers and visitors, Uncle Jimmy was a canyon character, with colorful stories and a kind engaging smile. Western novelist Zane Grey<sup>15</sup> was in and out of his camps for several years. While they hunted mountain lion together, Uncle Jim gave the tenderfoot the facts for his books *Riders of the Purple Sage*, *Tales of Lonely Trails* and *Roping Lions in the Grand Canyon*. Grey immortalized Jim's partner, Buffalo Jones, in *The Last of the Plainsmen*. Uncle Jim became a living character in other western odysseys as well as on the silver screen. Marguerite Henry's beloved children's classic *Brightly of the Grand Canyon* featured a fictionalized account of Brightly the burro and his lifelong friendship with Uncle Jimmy Owens.<sup>16</sup> One could speculate that the young Jim Owens may have been portrayed as Jim Lloyd in James Michener's *Centennial* or as Newt Dobbs in Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*.<sup>17</sup>

The older Uncle Jim Owens was a lean, wiry, canyon celebrity, about 170 pounds, with firm square face and droopy white mustache, twinkling blue eyes – full of spirit – and a week's growth of white stubble on his jaw. He was a familiar sight on the North Rim, often seen galloping along on his mule, preceded by a pack of hound dogs which he alternately scolded and encouraged.<sup>18</sup>:

Of all his hounds, Ol' Pot was Uncle Jim's favorite. Usually, each dog had his own blanket. If Pot, as leader of the pack, got left out he would go to Jim and whine, then go to the door of their tent or cabin and act as if he saw someone coming and start barking. The entire pack of canines would run outside barking and Pot would claim one of the warm blankets.<sup>19</sup> Jim gave his hounds first consideration, his horses and mules second, and himself third. Pot's collar was inscribed with an epitaph: "I Have Been at the Death of More Than 600 Cougars."<sup>20</sup>

In 1907, Uncle Jim became the first game warden for the forest reserve where his mission was predator



Charles M. Russell watercolor of Uncle Jim Owens, 1905, courtesy Harley Shaw

control – to hunt and trap cougars and wolves in order to protect the mule deer on the North Rim. He competed for the job by taking a written examination with three others who whispered among themselves that they felt sorry for Jim, "He won't git nowhar in this examination." Jim later recalled, "Well, when it come to book knowledge I wasn't in it at all, but when it come to real experience – well, that was a leetle bit different, and when the examination was over I felt awful sorry for them. The highest grade any of 'em got was 70, while I got 96."<sup>21</sup> The following year, President Roosevelt,

always infatuated with the West, reserved all public lands within the Grand Canyon Forest Reserve as Grand Canyon National Monument – a kind of purgatory between a forest reserve and a national park. He also designated all forest land north of the river as Kaibab National Forest. Brandishing a Colt six-shooter on his belt, a Winchester rifle across his saddle and a pack of faithful hound dogs, the hunter served as game warden until the establishment of Grand Canyon National Park on February 26, 1919. By then Uncle Jim had turned 70 years old.

## CHANGING TIMES AND TREASURED MEMORIES

When Uncle Jim retired from his government job, he continued as an independent lion hunter, trapper and guide. With the Grand Canyon now being administered by the National Park Service, Uncle Jim was no longer allowed to feed his dogs mule deer meat. So while blood-thirsty cougars could eat all the deer meat they wanted, the dogs, which protected the deer, had to settle for beef. Using his personal records, Jim calculated that he had killed 532 cougars,<sup>22</sup> but legend credits him with more, including one in August 1909 that he captured live, packed on horseback down Bright Angel Canyon, across the river on David Rust's cableway,

and up to the El Tovar Hotel on the South Rim. That particular cougar, destined to rendezvous with a circus, was shipped by rail to his former partner, Buffalo Jones, in Las Vegas, New Mexico where it escaped during unloading. By that time Jones had withdrawn from their House Rock Valley enterprise and started a new ranch in New Mexico.

There is some irony in the government allowing Jim Owens to nearly exterminate the mountain lion on the North Rim. The mule deer outgrew their forage resources and in the winter of 1924-1925, more than half of the deer population died of starvation. The tragedy was a classic example of wildlife mismanagement, but it fostered new thinking about the importance of Nature's delicate

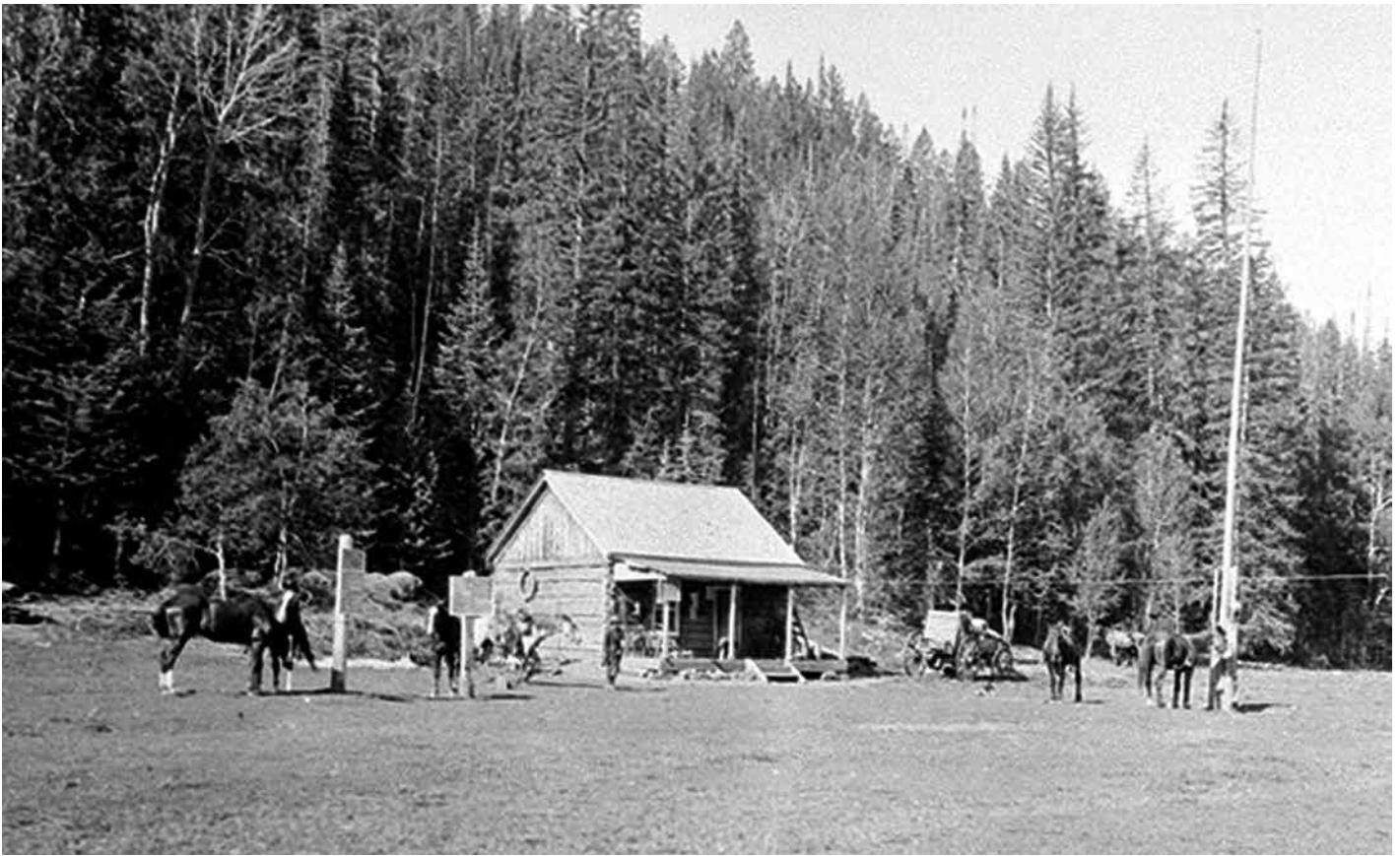
balance between predator and prey.

Except during the winter months, Uncle Jim lived in two cabins on the North Rim, one situated at the head of Bright Angel Canyon, the other near a spring in Harvey Meadow,<sup>23</sup> a secluded grassy clearing in the forest, where he posted a sign: "*Jim Owens Camp, Guiding and Hunting Parties. Specialty - Cougars Caught to Order. Rates Reasonable.*" With North Rim snow depths of six feet or more and brutal sub-zero temperatures, Uncle Jim usually wintered in Fredonia.

Jim was somewhat of a recluse but cherished memories of the few distinguished visitors who happened by. In the Summer of 1911, Sharlot Hall,<sup>24</sup> daughter of an ornery, tobacco-chewing buffalo hunter, visited House Rock Valley, the Kaibab Plateau and



Uncle Jim, second from left, guiding hunting party in August 1913, GRCA 5281



Uncle Jim's cabin in Harvey Meadows on the North Rim, July 1919, GRCA 5287

the Arizona Strip. Uncle Jim spent three days showing her the lay of the land. With Utah's designs on lands north of the Colorado and Arizona closing in on statehood, her historic tour across the Kaibab served to raise public awareness of the region's great potential.

One of Uncle Jim's favorite memories dated back to July 1913 when he guided former president Teddy Roosevelt and his 15-year old son Quentin and 19-year old son Archie, plus cousin Nicholas, on a two-week mountain lion hunt on the North Rim. Jesse Cummings of Mesa, Arizona went along as cook, packer and horse-wrangler.<sup>25</sup> Uncle Jim announced to the hunting party: "We'll eat off the land – mountain lion meat and wild horse flesh!"<sup>26</sup> As it turns out, Teddy found cougar meat to be just as tasty as venison.

One of Teddy's hunting objectives was to get a shot at the fabled white cougar that made news in many papers of the day. In fact, the former president carried the tattered news-

clipping in his pocket and on his way to the Canyon, a fellow reiterated the white cougar story. Uncle Jim, in his ever-present Texas drawl, responded, "I had heard that yarn before too, and of course took no stock in it." Jim hesitated a moment as Teddy guessed his thoughts. "There isn't any such thing, eh?" said the Colonel in his rather terse manner. "That fellow lied to me, did he?" Jim cautioned, "Well, Colonel, let's not say that he lied. But I've been in this forest a good many years and killed a good many cougars here and seen a lot more I didn't get – and I've never seen a white one."<sup>27</sup> With that Uncle Jim set the record straight by unraveling how the wild tale came about. Earlier that summer, a hunting party's pack burro had entered their tent in search of food. As the hunters lingered on the rim, watching the sun slip below the horizon, one of them returned to the tent for his pipe. Just then a white monster emerged, scaring the pipe-smoker half to death. Jim explained that to keep their flour out of reach of critters, the sack had been hung

from the ridge pole. The burro had nibbled a hole in the sack and then busied himself with other eatables, all the while being sprinkled white with sifted flour. Finally realizing that there really was no such animal as a white cougar, Teddy roared with laughter.<sup>28</sup>

Five and a half years later, Uncle Jim was saddened to learn that his old friend Teddy Roosevelt had passed away without seeing his dream come true. The former president died on January 6, 1919, New Mexico Statehood Day, just 50 days before Grand Canyon became a national park.

Those who knew Jim well and knew him to never stray from the truth, swear that the following incident actually took place. While rounding up his horses, Jim jumped off a low-cut bank and landed squarely astride a cougar which was feeding on a deer carcass. Before Jim could recover from his surprise, the cougar took off with Jim on his back. The ride lasted only 50 or 60 feet with

Jim trying to get a firm hand-hold on the critter's sleek tawny hide. Finally the cougar shot out from between his legs. Jim insisted no one could ride a cougar as long as he did – even with spurs.<sup>29</sup>

With permission from the government, Uncle Jim was free to move his buffalo from pastures in the forest and House Rock Valley, along the eastern edge of the Kaibab Plateau, to various places in the Park, including the Walhalla Plateau and Nankoweap Canyon. In April 1921, he attempted to secure a permit to guide parties on horseback over trails on the North Rim and down Bright Angel Creek to the river. He presented plans for a tourist camp on Walhalla's Cape Royal to lodge 20 visitors, with 40 to 50 buffalo nearby as a tourist attraction. In both cases, permission was denied since the Fred Harvey Company had already been contracted to provide such services in the park, although the company had no plans at the time for hotel, camp or trail development on the North Rim.

When Uncle Jim was allowed only temporary use of Cape Royal for the 1921 season, he realized that times were changing. In the days of the Forest Service, he was allowed to operate with discretion; but under the administration of the new National Park Service, decisions had to come from distant men in Washington swivel-chairs.

The veteran bounty hunter and guide retired in House Rock Valley in the 1920s to tend his buffalo herd. Where so many frontiersmen had grown hard and brash in their declining years, pipe-smoking Uncle Jim grew mellow and content as he reflected about his life journey. Conjuring up treasured memories, he spent his days gazing at the snorting buffalo, symbols of the frontier days when great herds roamed free.

Uncle Jimmy managed to draw several of his Texas "nephews", some having just returned from service in World War I, to his North Rim realm, especially during the summer months. These young Texans looked up to Jimmy as an "Uncle" while

Uncle Jim with four of his hunting hounds against a backdrop of three large lion skins; his favorite, ol' Pot, is on his near-left, GRCA 12093





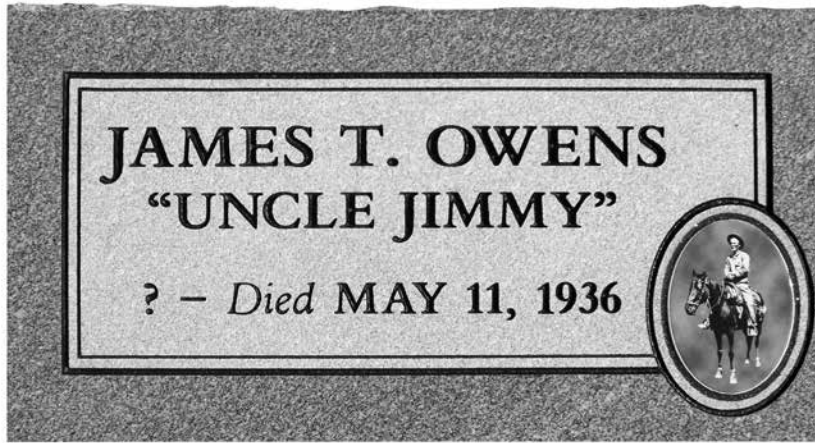


growing up in the tiny ranch community of Claude in the Texas Panhandle. Ed "Breezy" Cox<sup>30</sup> actually came to live full-time with Jim and worked as a stockman, assisting with hunting parties and buffalo wrangling. Bob Vaughan settled on the North Rim after serving in the Army. Bob's older brother Bill arrived in May

1919 and was like an adopted son to Jim.<sup>31</sup> Ernie Appling also arrived in May 1919. Ernie first met Jim in 1900 in Claude when Jim was working at Leigh Dyer's ranch. Leigh's daughter Annie never left the Panhandle but she wrote many newspaper and magazine articles about Uncle Jimmy. All four "nephews" – Ed, Bill, Bob and Ernie – protégés of Uncle Jim, assisted the legendary hunter at various times during his House Rock Valley days, and Leigh Dyer's brother, Walter, by then in his 60s, spent one summer at the Canyon to lend Jim a hand.<sup>32</sup> Ed's older brother, John Cox,<sup>33</sup> would play a major role in Uncle Jim's final years in New Mexico.

NPS Director Stephen Mather, in consideration of the government's nominal charge for grazing permits over the years, urged the aging Uncle Jim to will his buffalo to the Park Service as a memorial to himself.<sup>34</sup> He would keep the buffalo during his remaining years, then ownership would revert to the Park Service and the herd would be known as the James T. Owens Memorial Buffalo Herd. Instead, in 1926, he sold the herd to the State of Arizona for \$10,000.

In 1927, Uncle Jim returned to the Texas Panhandle for a visit. After an absence of 25 years, he was reunited with his former trail boss, the aging "Uncle" Charlie Goodnight. The two old-timers had their portraits taken in a Clarendon studio and reminisced about their famous cattle drives and the time when they first entered Palo Duro Canyon by way of an old



Uncle Jimmy's final resting place in the Masonic Cemetery in Las Cruces, New Mexico, courtesy Al LeCount

Comanche trail. It was there that the 27-year old Jim Owens had helped establish the Goodnight Ranch. Jim recalled that the canyon floor was full of ranging buffalo which had to be stampeded out to make room for the cattle, *"Them buffaloes went tearing and plunging down the breaks, making kindling wood of every tree and shrub that stood in their way."*<sup>35</sup>

#### LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

Two years after their historic reunion, the venerable Charles Goodnight passed away in Tucson, Arizona at age 93. That was late in December 1929, the year John Cox<sup>36</sup> relocated his "uncle" to his place in Afton, New Mexico, a lonely whistle stop on the Union Pacific railroad, halfway between El Paso and Deming. Today Afton is not even a ghost town as nothing remains except some weathered boards from an old corral and some rock foundations, with scrubland as far as one can see. But it once had a post office and a railway station where Cox lived and worked.<sup>37</sup>

It was the year of the Texas Republic Centennial when James T. Owens passed away in Afton. His heart gave out on May 11, 1936<sup>38</sup> at age 87. Perhaps John Cox was influenced by the old cowboy folksong *Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie*. He made sure that the transplanted Texan's final resting place would not be on the lone prairie. In fact, Uncle Jim was buried 20 miles northeast of Afton, in the

Masonic Cemetery in Las Cruces, about 100 feet from Sheriff Pat Garrett but 600 miles from the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

Uncle Jim was a remnant of the Old West, perhaps more famous than Garrett, but relatively unknown in New Mexico where he died in obscurity, his contributions unacknowledged and

his life unheralded – that is, until Al LeCount of Albany, Ohio, retired wildlife manager, and Harley Shaw of Hillsboro, New Mexico, 27-year veteran of Arizona Game and Fish and former Kaibab Plateau resident, added a proper gravestone to Uncle Jim's previously unmarked grave and conducted a simple dedication ceremony on November 16, 2013 to honor the famous North Rim pioneer. A question mark on the stone denotes the continuing uncertainty in the date of Uncle Jim's birth.<sup>39</sup>

For Uncle Jim, the North Rim was not just a destination but a way of life – a life as hard as the craggy canyon walls. While he captured wild animals, the North Rim captured him. He endured the bitter hardships of living on the ragged edge of civilization. He had the drive and stamina of a buffalo to survive in the deep haunting silence of the wilderness. He maintained an overriding respect and reverence for nature and relished the simplicity of life on the frontier. He never failed to do the kindest things that man and circumstances would permit. This North Rim pioneer was bestowed an enduring honor by the Washington-based National Geographic Board in 1932 when Natchi Point, above Roaring Springs, was renamed Uncle Jim Point.<sup>40</sup>

His breed has vanished, but his legend lives on as a reminder of the importance of balance in Nature. In a back-handed way<sup>41</sup>, Jim Owens deserves some credit

– in being such an expert hunter, he helped precipitate a tragedy at the Grand Canyon that pointed the nation toward more realistic wildlife management policies.<sup>42</sup>

In the continuum of ages that has dropped the canyon floor ever lower, James T. Owens' life on the edge occupied a very thin slice of time. But he signed his name to Grand Canyon's human history and will forever be remembered as the Grand Old Man of the North Rim.

### Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank Leon Cox, Al LeCount and Harley Shaw for their assistance in telling Jim Owens' story. All three men lived and worked on the Kaibab and had the good fortune of knowing folks who knew Uncle Jimmy. The author also thanks Kim and Kelli Cox for their genealogical research on Uncle Jim's "nephews."

### (Endnotes)

1 Jim Owens states that he was 72 in 1920, implying he was born in 1848. Census entries show other birth years. It is believed that the most reliable source is writer Annie Dyer Nunn (1885-1984) who stated Jim was born on April 11, 1849. Annie was well acquainted with Jim Owens and Charles Goodnight. She was the daughter of Leigh R. Dyer (1849-1902), a Texas Panhandle pioneer and rancher, who was also Goodnight's brother-in-law.

2 Letter dated May 16, 1952 from Annie Dyer Nunn of Amarillo, Texas to Lemuel "Lon" A. Garrison, Assistant Superintendent, Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP), Arizona.

3 Annie Dyer Nunn, *James T. (Uncle Jim) Owens*, A Collection of Memories: A History of Armstrong County (1876-1905), Vol. 1, p5, 1939. Annie was the daughter of Leigh and Willie Dyer who were married in 1883 and settled on a ranch eight miles south of Claude, Texas. She married Paul Martin Nunn (1882-1965), son of Dr. George J. Nunn, a pioneer resident of Amarillo, Texas.

4 It is believed that the notorious gunfighter Clay Allison (1841-1887) was one of the 16 cowhands on the 1866 cattle drive.

5 Annie Dyer Nunn, *The Dyer Brothers – Leigh and Walter*, Genealogy Trails History Group, Randall County, Texas.

6 Annie Dyer Nunn, *James T. (Uncle Jim) Owens*, A Collection of Memories: A History of Armstrong County. The year was probably 1898 since Jones was returning from the Yukon and Alaska in 1897, arriving in Kansas in October 1898.

7 Annie Dyer Nunn, *He Returns as a Famous Man*, Amarillo Sunday News and Globe, 1927.

8 *A Mighty Hunter of the Olden Days*, New York Herald-Tribune, 1936.

9 Annie Dyer Nunn, *He Returns as a Famous Man*.

10 *A Mighty Hunter of the Olden Days*, New York Herald-Tribune, 1936.

11 Letter dated December 25, 1951 from John H. Clark, Civil Engineer, Panguitch, Utah to Lon Garrison, GCNP.

12 Article by Annie Dyer Nunn, *Full Cry* magazine, 1937.

13 Letter dated May 16, 1952 from Annie Dyer Nunn to Lon Garrison.

14 Part of the 1944 movie *Buffalo Bill* was filmed in House Rock Valley. Ironically, the real-life Buffalo Bill, William F. Cody (1846-1917), had favored this area as a buffalo range.

15 Zane Grey (1872-1939), at the urging of Buffalo Jones, came West in 1907 to hunt with Jones and Owens. Grey was a disillusioned eastern dentist with fantasies of becoming a writer. His experience on the Kaibab was an inspiration for many of his western novels.

16 Uncle Jim is mentioned 274 times, and appears in 21 sketches by artist Wesley Dennis, in *Brightly of the Grand Canyon* (1953) by Marguerite Henry (1902-1997).

17 Larry McMurtry's hometown of Archer City, Texas is just 34 miles north of Fort Belknap, the starting place for Goodnight's historic 1866 cattle drive. One of his favorite books is James Evetts Haley's *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman*.

18 *A Mighty Hunter of the Olden Days*, New York Herald-Tribune, 1936.

19 History Files, Research Library, GCNP.

20 William M. Mace, *Uncle Jim Owens, Master Cougar Killer of the Kaibab*, unpublished manuscript, and Interview with Forest Ranger Ben Swapp, Kanab, Arizona, Summer 1951, History Files, GCNP. Pot's collar was probably a gross exaggeration.

21 Annie Dyer Nunn, *He Returns as a Famous Man*.

22 Interview with Ben Swapp, History Files, GCNP. Uncle Jim's lion count may have included wolves, bobcats, coyotes, and a bear or two. Considering lion population over time and the number of years Jim hunted, wildlife biologist Al LeCount does not believe the count.

23 Owens' Harvey Meadow cabin was used as a Park Service check station in 1930.

24 Sharlot M. Hall (1870-1943) became the first woman to hold office in the Arizona Territorial government.

25 Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), *A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1916.

26 Stewart Aitchison, *Grand Canyon's North Rim and Beyond*, p43, Grand Canyon Association, 2008.

27 Thomas Heron McKee, "Uncle Jim" Owens and His Dogs Have Killed 1500 Cougars, *The American Magazine*, p50-51, 172-173.

28 *An Anecdote of the Roosevelt Visit to the Kaibab*, History Files, GCNP, January 20, 1953.

29 Letter dated March 12, 1952 from John Clark, Panguitch, Utah to Lon Garrison, GCNP. Despite Jim's economy of the truth, this wild tale is very hard to believe. The lion would have bolted while Jim was still airborne.

30 Edward Thomas Cox was born on October 11, 1885. Charles Herriman "Bob" Vaughan was born in Claude, Texas on July 7, 1893. While he served in the Army during the war, Ed Cox took care of his hunting dogs. William Leigh Vaughan was also born in Claude, on March 11, 1890. He named his son John Owens Vaughan (1931-2006).

31 1920 Census, Fredonia, Coconino County, Arizona.

32 Acting Superintendent Lon Garrison interview with Ernest "Ernie" Filmore Appling of Claude, Texas, July 1951, History Files, GCNP. In Claude, Jim Owens, while working on the Dyer Ranch, was part owner with Jeff and John Martin in a general merchandise store.

33 John R. Cox, born in 1883, worked as a prospector in the Union Pacific railroad town of Corona, New Mexico in 1910. At the time he was living with his mother and siblings.

34 Letter dated April 2, 1921 from NPS Director Stephen Mather to GCNP Superintendent D. L. Reaburn and letter dated October 28, 1921 from Mather to Owens.

35 Annie Dyer Nunn, *He Returns as a Famous Man*.

36 1930 Census, La Mesa, Dona Ana County, New Mexico. Jim Owens was living with John R. Cox and his wife.

37 Personal communication with Harley Shaw of Hillsboro, New Mexico. The Afton Post Office operated from 1924 to 1941. The Afton railway station was UPRR train order station #1258.

38 Just 23 days after Uncle Jim's passing, *Lonesome Dove* author Larry McMurtry was born in Wichita Falls, Texas.

39 Al LeCount and Harley Shaw, *Finding Uncle Jimmy's Grave*, Arizona Wildlife Views, p27-29, January-February 2014.

40 *Coconino Sun*, Flagstaff, Arizona, May 20, 1932.

41 In another back-handed way, the fabled Brightly symbolized a growing environmental problem with thousands of overgrazing feral burros threatening a dwindling population of native desert bighorn sheep. This wildlife management issue reared its cuddly burro head in the 1970s and 1980s and resulted in the eventual removal of Brightly and all his friends from the Grand Canyon.

42 Kathy Viele, *Uncle Jimmy Owens*, The Grand Canyon Guide, July 29 - August 11, 1979, Grand Canyon Natural History Association.

# Introducing Board Member Slim Woodruff

**OP: How did you get involved in the Grand Canyon Historical Society?**

SW: George Billingsley and I were in the Northern Arizona University Hiking club back in the day. Whenever I ran into him, he told me I should join what was then the Grand Canyon Pioneer Society. That was the first I had heard of it.

**OP: Why did you decide to run for the Board?**

SW: I saw a notice that there were vacancies, and my husband said, "You are into history: you should do that." I hope to be able to contribute to the mission of the Historical Society.

**OP: When did you first come to Grand Canyon?**

SW: When I was a kid, I think about ten, we were in Flagstaff, and I saw a sign that said "Grand Canyon, 90 miles". I had just found out that if one drives at 60 MPH, it takes one minute to cover one mile, so I piped up, "Look, we are only an hour and a half from the Grand Canyon!" So we went.

I recall starting to hike down the Bright Angel Trail, clueless and innocent, and my mother grabbed me. "They make the trail look nice and wide up here to lure you in! Once you get down inside it gets narrow and steep and dangerous!" Now I've hiked several thousand miles in the Canyon, a lot of it narrow, steep, and dangerous.

**OP: You mentioned the Northern Arizona University Hiking Club. Did the Club do a lot at the Canyon?**

SW: We were up here all the time. Back in the day, permits were completely unrestricted, so we could



show up on a Friday night, wake up the ranger, and get a permit to do just about anything we wanted. It was a big shock when they built the new headquarters, the one located by the Shrine, and we had to be here before 5 PM to get a permit.

Harvey Butchart was our advisor, and he would tell us things like: I think there is a route between Tanner and the Hance – why don't you kids check it out? I was never skilled enough to actually hike with Harvey. In fact, he would introduce me as the one who "drew the frogs". The mascot for the Hiking Club was the Giant Chicken Eating Frog, and as editor of the paper, I drew the frogs.

**OP: When did you get interested in the history of Grand Canyon?**

SW: When I became an instructor for the Grand Canyon Association Field Institute. As people would ask questions, I would do more research so I could answer them. As I got more knowledgeable, the questions became more detailed, and I had to do more research. Kind of an infinite loop.

I am especially intrigued by the history of the trails. Who first developed them and for what purpose. When we first started hiking here, the non-Corridor trails

were almost impassible because no one had been using them. On the New Hance Trail, we were given a mimeographed paper with certain "waypoints" to hit in order to stay on the route. Now, of course, millions of busy little feet have worn in pathways.

**OP: Do you have a favorite pioneer?**

SW: I think the women put up with a lot up here. Ada Bass had to run the hotel on her own. Blanche Kolb raised a young girl on the Rim with, initially, no other children and no school. Bessie Hyde actually followed her man to her death. Often young girls in my Meet the Canyon classes ask me how the women could stand for that kind of stuff. I tell them back then, that was your job. You got a man, and you put up with it.

Of course, I am mad about Mary Colter. I emphasize her and her buildings a lot when I teach. SHE didn't put up with anything.

**OP: Any closing comments?**

SW: I hope to be able to be of help where I can. Organizing the History Symposium, helping to preserve the history of Grand Canyon, getting involved in the outings.

# The Night The Kolb House Burned Down

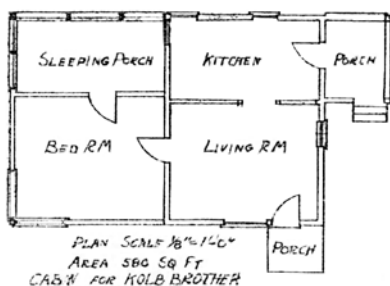
by Wayne Ranney and Bryan Brown

No, the iconic Kolb Studio located at the head of the Bright Angel Trail never burned down. It has stood there continuously since about 1904 and through the years has only been added to, rather than subtracted from. The Kolb house we refer to (or cabin as it was sometimes called), was located in Pinyon Park about a half mile south of the Kolb Studio. This Kolb house is little known today, having slipped into a dark cubbyhole of history. But on the night it disappeared, it blazed a bright light in a small corner of Grand Can-

yon Village. Two parallel versions of the fire story exist -- the official report by the Park rangers and firemen who responded to the event, and the untold story of events leading up to, and possibly explaining, the fire itself.

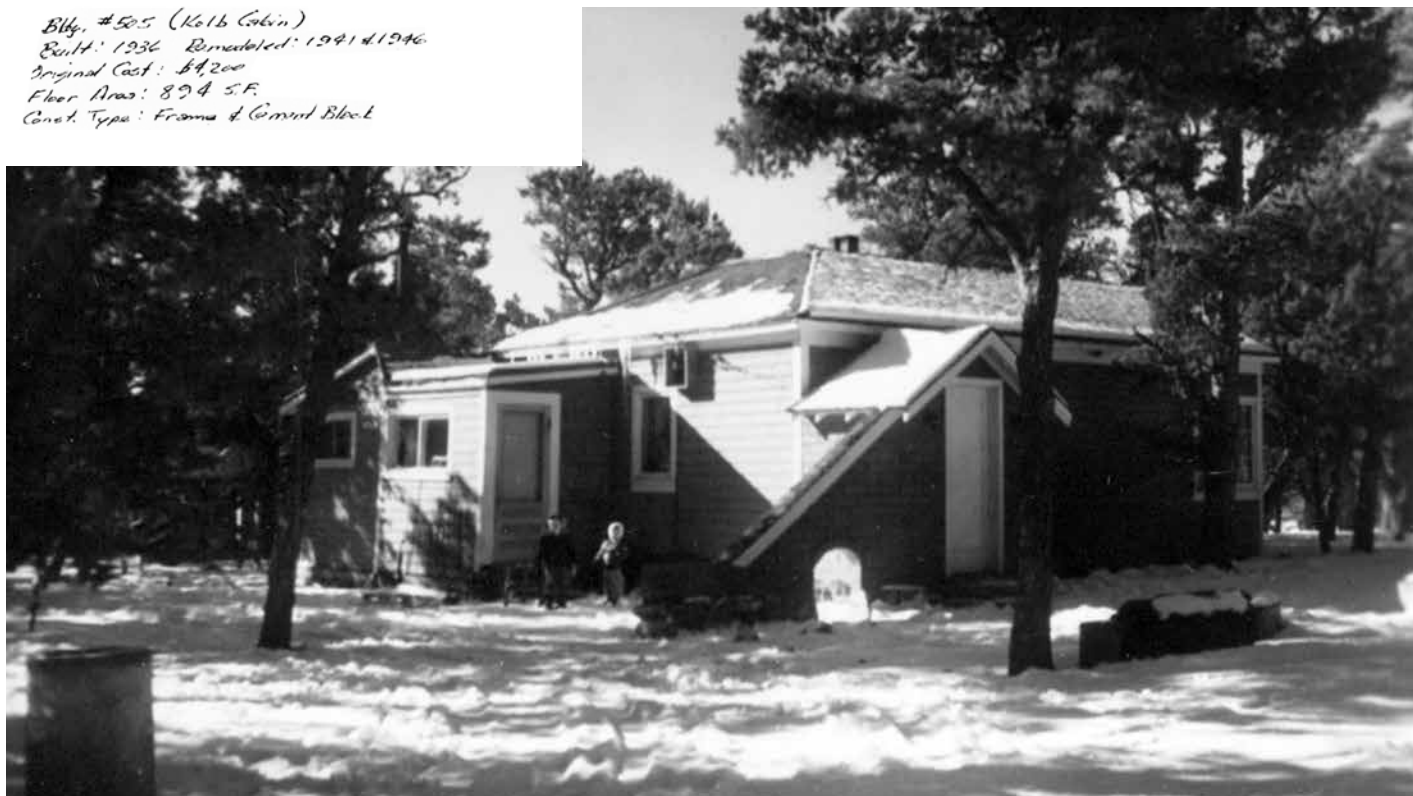
Pinyon Park in the late 1970s was a rustic collection of small trailers, providing housing for numerous NPS and concessionaire employees. Oddly, the Kolb house was the only permanent structure to be found there. It was built in 1936 as building #505, presumably for one of the "Kolb brothers." We assume this brother is Ellsworth for use on his infrequent visits from Los Angeles. But we do not know for sure as there were two other Kolb brothers named Edward and Ernest. The initial cost of construction is listed at \$4,200 and the house was remodeled twice in 1941 and 1946. It is listed in Park records as having 894 sq. ft. (see NPS floor plan) and was valued at \$30,000 at time it burned.

We obtained a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) redacted copy of the Case Incident Report, which describes the fire and its causes in a straightforward way. Ranger Ernie Kuncel received a radio call from dispatch early on the morning of February 19, 1979, informing him that, "the Kolb house was on fire and that a male was in the roadway, nude, and in shock." Rangers Kuncel and Tom Doerr responded and were the first officers at the scene. On arrival, they found the house "totally involved with flames coming from all windows and doorways." The report states, "only four or five persons were watching the blaze," occurring on a cold winter's night with snow on the ground. One of these watching the blaze was Mark Jeffers, a personal friend to both of us who was rather quickly determined to be responsible for setting the house on fire. Mark was known to suffer from a mental illness (schizophrenia) that likely led to his actions that night.



*Bldg. #505 (Kolb Cabin)  
 Built: 1936 Remodeled: 1941 & 1946  
 Original Cost: \$4,200  
 Floor Area: 894 S.F.  
 Const. Type: Frame & Gypsum Block*

Kolb Cabin



## Wayne

I knew Mark Jeffers from our time growing up together in Pomona California. He lived across a very busy street in a different neighborhood and so was only an acquaintance to me at Little League events and during our high school years. However, I soon formed a friendship with Don Webster and as he was a close friend of Mark's in high school, I too became a closer friend with Mark in our early college years at Cal Poly Pomona. The three of us would often go exploring and camping in the Mojave Desert together. After I moved to Grand Canyon in October 1975, both Don and Mark decided to move to the canyon as well to pursue jobs. Don found work in the General Offices for Amfac (the Hawaiian-based conglomerate that purchased the Fred Harvey Company in 1968) and Mark held various jobs, including one where he served as Emery Kolb's personal caretaker. Mark lived in-house with the famous photographer during the last months of his life and was the one who made that fateful call to dispatch on December 11, 1976, when Emery died of a heart attack in his rim-side home.

Mark was a gentle giant of a guy, 6 foot, 5 inches tall with a large frame and head size to match. As was the custom of the day, he wore his hair rather long but not to the length of a pony tail. As I was working as an Inner Canyon ranger, I had only minimal contact with Mark but he and Don and I would occasionally take hiking trips into the canyon or elsewhere around northern Arizona. Mark was a thoughtful, often philosophical soul with whom one could enjoy a deep conversation. Even before his mental illness took hold however, I had the feeling that he wasn't entirely comfortable in his own skin. He sometimes acted as if he didn't "fit in" with those around him. There was

just something in him that seemed deep and perhaps not yet fully resolved. Still, he was a friend and in those free and easy days of the 1970s, we partook in many of life's pleasures. After Emery Kolb's passing, daughter Edith asked Mark if he would serve as caretaker of the famous Rim-side home and so we all had access (often late at night) to the Kolb Studio — all free and clear for six months or more. In fact, Emery's daughter Edith allowed Don, Mark and many of our other friends to make offers on Kolb's furniture, before most of it was sold at the big estate sale held in 1977.

A prior agreement between Emery Kolb and the National Park Service dictated that the house in Pinyon Park revert to NPS ownership after Kolb's death, and the Park Service was using it at the time of the fire for employee housing. Although in the months leading up to the fire as many as three employees would be living there at any given time, only one employee was in residence at the time of the fire in February 1979, Rosalie Lechner. Lechner came to the Park in 1976 as a mail clerk and later served as secretary to the Superintendent's staff. She lost everything in the fire except what she was wearing that day and her automobile, which was with her that night at her boyfriend's house. She related to me when interviewed for this story that she had a premonition that the

house was going to burn. Where that came from, she did not know.

It started on the afternoon of February 18 when Lechner heard a loud knock on the window. It was Mark Jeffers who asked her if she had any food. Lechner said he had a weird look on his face but thought nothing of it thinking he might just be cold. She invited him in and made him a sandwich. When Mark stated that his car had broken down Rosalie invited him to stay at the house that night. Mark thanked her and then asked Lechner if she believed in God. Lechner soon left for her boyfriend's house, which would be the last time she saw the house or any of her possessions.

## Bryan

I lived in Pinyon Park that winter, in a small trailer a short distance from the old Kolb house. Mark was a part of my extended family of friends and acquaintances and I would see him from time to time around the Village, or he would stop by my trailer for a brief visit in the evenings after work. The night of February 18–19 was very cold and several feet of snow were on the ground. As chance would have it, a friend of mine from Phoenix had gotten a ride to the South Rim that day and was crashing in my trailer that night. His nickname was Foot, and we were sitting around the small wood stove in the living room when there was a loud knocking at the front door.

I got up, opened the door, and there was Mark, all 6-foot-5-inches of him. And he was butt-naked. Standing barefoot in the snow, his breath turning to fog in the cold, Mark had wrapped his arms around himself and was visibly shivering.

"God told me to have sex with you," he said in a calm and matter-of-fact tone.

Right away, I knew something was wrong. Mark said nothing further about his declared mission, or anything else for that matter, but stood in the snow and stared



at me. He was my friend, though, and I invited him inside in spite of the decidedly unusual circumstances.

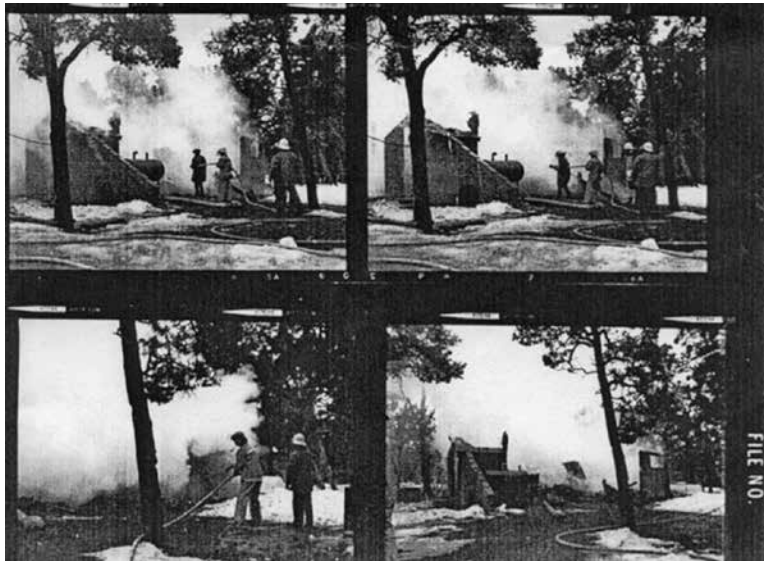
“Why don’t you come over and sit by the stove to get warm, Mark?” was more-or-less what I recall saying to him, while choking down a growing sense of anxiety. Mark sat on the floor in front of the stove. I introduced him to my friend Foot and tried to start a disarming conversation, once it became clear to me that Mark was not stoned out of his mind, in the hope of distracting him from his stated purpose.

On the sofa, Foot was frozen in place and appeared to be on the verge of totally freaking out. Mark was still shivering uncontrollably, so I put several more pieces of wood into the stove, leaving its door open so that more heat would spill out into the room. Mark remained on the floor in front of the stove, staring intently into the flames. The three of us talked about various things, none of which I can remember, and after about half an hour Mark seemed to return to normal except for the naked part.

Then Mark jumped up and ran outside the trailer, his private parts swinging in the breeze (it’s funny the details which are vividly remembered), and disappeared into the night. Foot and I looked at each other and said, almost simultaneously, “What if he comes back?!” So we quickly made a plan which made perfect sense to us at the time — we got our sleeping bags and went out to sleep in the back seats of my vehicle, reasoning that if he did return he would not think to look there for us. After about half an hour of discussing what had really just happened, we fell asleep.

We awoke to the sound of nearby sirens some time later. Not associating the sirens with Mark’s unusual behavior, we went back to sleep.

All seemed normal the next morning. Mark was nowhere to be seen,



Foot muttered some reason why he had to leave right away and find a ride back to Phoenix, and I went in to work at the old Visitor’s Center (now the NPS Administration Building). By then everyone was talking about how the old Kolb house in Pinyon Park had burned down and how Mark was in jail on charges of suspected arson. It slowly dawned on me that Foot and I had been witness to at least some of the events leading up to the fire and had possibly, but unknowingly, contributed to its cause. I never thought to speak with the investigating rangers about our experience with Mark on that fateful night, and it is here that my untold story merges with the official NPS narrative of the event.

I never heard from Foot again, and to this day I do not know what became of him. I sold my trailer in 1980 and moved to Tucson several years before Pinyon Park was changed forever and turned into acres of more modern housing for South Rim employees. And although this is only a guess, I suspect that the NPS was content to have the old Kolb house go away. Emery Kolb had a rocky relationship with the NPS over the years and there were those who were glad to see any memory of him fade away.

For my part, I still feel a slight twinge of guilt whenever remembering the event. Should I have immediately reported that a large, naked, and decidedly deranged man was running

around Pinyon Park in the snow? If he had scared Foot and me (oh, and he had....), then could he have alarmed or even harmed others? And if I had notified the authorities about Mark, could I have prevented Rosalie Lechner from losing her worldly possessions? The image of Mark staring intently into the flames of my wood stove, and its possible relationship to the fire at the Kolb house, continues to disturb me at some level. This small

anecdote is not an attempt at second-guessing history, and I will leave it to the reader to judge whether it could represent confession and atonement.

### Wayne

Jeffers later confessed to lighting a pillow on fire that was placed on top of a mattress in the northeast bedroom. As he was taken into custody it was obvious to the rangers that Mark was not coherent and might pose a danger to himself or others and was taken to the Clinic for observation and testing. When ranger Doerr offered to bring him some coffee, Mark lunged toward him and wrestled his firearm out of the holster. Unable to make it fire, he was ultimately subdued and placed in shackles, all the while muttering “the coming of the Lord” and other references to God.

Mark was diagnosed with schizophrenia and lived a rather scattered and unfortunate existence after this time. He was prescribed lithium but sometimes would refuse to take it, which set him on an uncertain path. He briefly moved back to California to live with his parents, then moved to Syracuse New York, before returning to California. One day on October 16, 2004, Jeffers was visited by his father in a state hospital home in Covina California. Jeffers father noted how particularly upbeat Mark seemed that day and they settled in to watch a football game on TV. Part-way through

## Grand Canyon Historical Society

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the game Mark excused himself for a moment and went out to the garage where he was later found hanging from a rope. No note was found.

For her part, Lechner believes that Mark's descent into mental illness might have stemmed from a rumor that the Pinyon Park house was built on top of an Indian site. She said she sometimes woke up there with a terrified feeling and was told by friends that the house might be occupied by "old spirits." I personally wonder if Mark's rather strict upbringing in a conservative Christian home might have somehow been interacting with a latent homosexuality in him (in those days not as readily accepted as now). Certainly, family history, chemical imbalances and other medical reasons played into his fall. But whatever idea one wishes to invoke, both of us feel awful for Mark and the unfortunate turn of events in his life. We are grateful that no one was hurt in the fire of February 19, 1979, and wish that Mark could have enjoyed his later years, as we have, in awe of the otherwise

peaceful surroundings in Grand Canyon National Park.

In January 2012, various surviving members of the Kolb family were invited back to Grand Canyon and the Kolb Studio. None of them had had much to do with Grand Canyon since attending Emery's funeral in 1976. Emery's grandson, Sonny Lehnert, was there with his wife Ruth and their daughter, Jennifer Draper. It was festive affair with a long overdue rapprochement between the Park Service and the Kolb family. I was touring the Kolb Studio with Jennifer when we got to Emery's bedroom. Many stories were being recalled and Jennifer piped up about her great-grandfather's final caretaker, a man whose name she couldn't quite remember but it "might have been Mark," and wondered out loud what might have happened to him. My jaw dropped as I then related to her my friendship with him, making sure not to mention the fire in Pinyon Park. Then she related with obvious pleasure how Emery had enjoyed his last nights listening to Mark Jeffers

play his 12-string guitar. She said it brought much joy to Emery and that I should thank Mark the next time I see him. I will thank Mark the next time I see him. Around every harrowing tale there is a bit of light.



Mark Jeffers – photo by Don Webster