

THE X BAR X BOYS

Sons of the Golden West

16,447 words

by David Baumann

1997-1998

Written for my website on the X Bar X Boys

<http://home.pacbell.net/dbaumann/>

INTRODUCTION TO THE X BAR X BOYS

Down and down the boys went, making their way carefully over the rocky trail until at last they came to the roaring waters of Bitter Rock Creek.

"What a view!" Teddy was impressed by the grandeur of the scene. "Never saw anything like it before, did you, Roy?"

Roy did not answer, but stood gazing at the beautiful vista before them.

Almost at their feet rushed the waters of the creek, sparkling and leaping over white stones that glistened and shone in the bright sunlight. On all sides rose the mountain peaks, their thickly wooded slopes rising almost perpendicular in places, and forming a natural frame for the shimmering water.

"The heart of the Rockies!" murmured Roy, at last. "Looks as if we're a million miles from nowhere. Gosh, it's good to be here, Teddy!"

(The X Bar X Boys Lost in the Rockies, pages 95-96)

Roy and Teddy Manley, brothers who live on the X Bar X ranch, were billed by their publishers Grosset & Dunlap as "real cowboys, on the job when required but full of fun and daring." Carol Billman, author of *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (pages 80-81), describes the boys in these words: "Though fashioned as western heroes, these two brothers form a team of crack explorers, who uncover the schemes of kidnappers, rustlers, and other shady western entrepreneurs."

The twenty-one volumes of the series were published from 1926 to 1942. The books themselves are thick volumes, the early ones with the glossy frontispiece customary in the Grosset & Dunlap books of that era. Through early 1932 the books appeared in gray; after that, they were produced in the dark red which is familiar to collectors of Don Sturdy, early Hardys, and other series of that era. The logo on the front of each red book shows a bucking bronco with a cowboy holding on with his left hand, right hand swinging his ten-gallon hat. (The logo is used to mark each entry in

this web site.) With apparent glee, he is glued to his flying mount, coiled lariat and bedroll airborne. The gray books have no logo.

These are books of the West (with a capital W, as the word customarily appears in the stories), but a West not unaware of the modern world—it is the world of the late 1920s and the 1930s. Cars appear once in a while, although very much the exception, until the last few books in the series, when they appear a little more often. In the first book, Mr. Manley, the boys' father, said he preferred "hoss flesh to flivvers" (*On the Ranch*, page 8). Other modern inventions such as the telephone are not unknown, but not often used. Wrist watches are newfangled items guaranteed to cause fun to be poked at their owners. This is very much a series of chaps and chaparral, guns and lariats, bunk houses and cattle drives, campfire coffee and bacon, leather and rodeos, sombreros and sagebrush, weather and wide open spaces.

This series, in spite of a regrettable flaw which is described in another place in the web site, is too much overlooked by series books fans. Although some of the later volumes are of poor quality, the early books in particular contain some of the most spectacular writing in series book history, with frequent and consistently moving descriptions of the splendor of the unspoiled West. It is topnotch writing indeed! Quality is less consistent after the first nine volumes, but most of the middle books keep an admirable standard before the final whimper.

These are the titles of the books and the years of their publication:

1. The X Bar X Boys on the Ranch (1926)
2. The X Bar X Boys in Thunder Canyon (1926)
3. The X Bar X Boys on Whirlpool River (1926)
4. The X Bar X Boys on Big Bison Trail (1927)
5. The X Bar X Boys at the Round Up (1927)
6. The X Bar X Boys at Nugget Camp (1928)
7. The X Bar X Boys at Rustlers' Gap (1929)
8. The X Bar X Boys at Grizzly Pass (1929)
9. The X Bar X Boys Lost in the Rockies (1930)
10. The X Bar X Boys Riding for Life (1931)
11. The X Bar X Boys in Smoky Valley (1932)
12. The X Bar X Boys at Copperhead Gulch (1933)
13. The X Bar X Boys Branding the Wild Herd (1934)
14. The X Bar X Boys at the Strange Rodeo (1935)
15. The X Bar X Boys With the Secret Rangers (1936)
16. The X Bar X Boys Hunting the Prize Mustangs (1937)
17. The X Bar X Boys at Triangle Mine (1938)
18. The X Bar X Boys and the Sagebrush Mystery (1939)
19. The X Bar X Boys in the Haunted Gully (1940)
20. The X Bar X Boys and the Lost Troopers (1941)
21. The X Bar X Boys Following the Stampede (1942)

An introduction to each story and a picture of each cover is located elsewhere in the site. The books are not too difficult to find. Even the later ones are accessible without much effort or expense, and copies in dust jacket are not uncommon. It took me just about two months to locate the entire set, at an average price of less than \$15 a volume.

THE CHARACTERS

The X Bar X ranch is owned by Bardwell Manley, a hardy and good-hearted, tough but fair man, perhaps fifty-five (*On the Ranch*, page 14). His father, Temple Manley, started the ranch in 1868, in the days of the wild west. The ranch hasn't changed too much since then. Bardwell, who in his younger days was a steely-eyed, don't-mess-with-me-or-my-dog type, was mellowed a little when he married Barbara. A former teacher of English in a Denver school, she is a blonde, blue-eyed beauty, also tough but always feminine, described in the books as "the blonde angel of the West."

One of the books describes them briefly in these words:

Bardwell Manley was a typical Westerner, as was his father before him—tall, dark and heavy-set. His wife, Barbara, is the opposite extreme, being a small blonde of the Dresden china type. (*Copperhead Gulch*, page 12)

In one of the early volumes, Barbara Manley's attitude toward her boys is described in words which also reveal a lot about her own character:

Whatever fears Mrs. Manley had for [her sons] she kept to herself. Never would she let them see that she worried when they were unaccountably absent. Long ago she had determined that the best way to bring up her sons was to make them independent, self-reliant. She knew that continual expressions of worry would only hinder their growth into what she wanted them to be—true men, sons of the West. They never realized that she had spent many sleepless nights wondering, praying for their safety when they were from home on a mission of danger. She wished them to be brave, and she, herself, held forth the shining example. What she was, her sons would be.

(*At the Round Up*, page 27)

The X Bar X boys are their two sons, Roy (age 16) and Teddy (age 15). The brothers enjoy the pure out-of-doors, and throughout the sixteen years of their series frustrate rustlers, kidnapers, and other ne'er-do-wells. They are described in the books as follows:

A glance at these two boys would instantly flash a word into the observer's mind—brothers. True, one was light and the other dark—but each had the same facial characteristics, the same set of shoulders and head. Roy Manley, who had ridden in from the ranch to meet Teddy, was the elder by one year. He it was who inherited the dark hair and eyes from his father, owner of the X Bar X. Yet, strangely enough, he was more inclined to his mother's disposition—serious, grave, thoughtful. The mother had been a teacher of English in a school near Denver before her marriage, and Roy took from her his love for books and poetry and, as Teddy remarked, "the blooming sunsets." Roy was the family philosopher.

Teddy Manley, on the other hand, had the hair and eyes of his mother and the happy, carefree, joyful nature of his father. He could never quite understand what Roy saw in the contemplation of a mountain at night, or of a river flashing beneath the morning sun.

"Golly," he would say, "you see that blamed thing day after day, night after night, and still you stand and moon at it! It'll be there tomorrow! Come on, let's eat!"

(*On Big Bison Trail*, pages 2-3)

The differing but very complementary dispositions of the brothers represent the two strengths and major features of the series—on the one hand practicality, action, and down-to-earth duty, with a shoot-from-the-hip eagerness for action and adventure; and on the other hand a deep appreciation for natural beauty which is almost contemplative.

The Manleys also have a daughter, Belle Ada, sometimes called Belle in the early volumes. Roy and Teddy's sister is twelve; she becomes thirteen sometime between volumes 14 and 15, and then miraculously becomes twelve again in volume 17. She is a true girl of the West, spotlessly pure but feisty, described as "fun-loving" and "dark-eyed and attractive." She teases her brothers almost relentlessly, but they adore her and she clearly loves and admires them.

Close friends to Belle Ada and providing romantic but very platonic interest for the boys are Nell Willis and Ethel Carew, New York girls who are long-time guests at the 8 X 8, a neighboring ranch fifteen miles to the west. The 8 X 8 is owned by Bardwell's good friend, Peter Ball, whose wife is aunt to Nell and Ethel (the latter usually called Curly). In the very last volume of the series, we learn that Mrs. Ball's first name is Martha (page 150). These city girls take to western ways quickly, learning to ride and adapting with eagerness to life in a ranch house.

The "girls," as Teddy called them, were the nieces of Mrs. Peter Ball, whose husband owned the nearest ranch to the X Bar X, the 8 X 8. For several summers the two girls had come from New York to spend their vacations on the ranch, and had become great favorites with the X Bar X boys, who regarded them simply in the light of pals, although Belle Ada tried her best to tease them about their love affairs.

Nell Willis, tall and dark, was the special favorite of Roy, while Ethel Carew, small and with golden locks, consequently christened Curly, was particularly interesting to Teddy.

(*Copperhead Gulch*, page 35)

Other characters include the ranch hands. Main fixtures on the X Bar X ranch are first of all Nick Looker, followed closely by Pop Burns, then Gus Trippe and Nat Raymond. In volume 14, Ranny Brown is added; by then Gus and Nat have faded into minor characters, rarely mentioned. Pop is the oldest puncher on the X Bar X, and claims to have invented the brand of the Manley ranch when Temple Manley first settled it—"two sawbucks with a piece of rail fence in between," as he described it.

A good summary of the hands is given in volume 12:

There was Nick Looker, tall and straight, a special favorite of the boys, who always acted as their bodyguard when any danger seemed lurking.

Pop Burns, the veteran of the X Bar X ranch, was waiting, his shiny bald head having been tanned a deep red by exposure to many years of sunshine.

Gus Trippe, long and lank, and Nat Raymond, fat and short but as strong as an ox, and a number of others who had heard that the boys had returned and wanted to hear their story, were on duty.

(Copperhead Gulch, pages 39-40)

Another ever-present personage is the cook for the cowboys, a Chinaman named Sing Lung, who definitely cannot be overlooked. He is overtly included in the family celebrations, an action pointedly moving against the common prejudice of the time. The incident is noted by the boys in this passage:

"Sing Lung will be over from the bunk house. It wouldn't be a party if he wasn't along. One thing about Mom, she doesn't play any favorites when she gives a party." "Shouldn't, either," asserted Roy. "Sing's as good as anybody else."

(At Grizzly Pass, page 23)

This rejection of racial stereotypes extends to the early series' attitude toward American Indians. The initial volumes credit the boys' skill in tracking to training they received from a respected Indian friend, although he never appears in the books. Regrettably, in later volumes, Sing Lung's character devolves into a humorous stereotype—almost an Oriental Stephen Fetchit—though the last volume goes far to redeem this image.

Inside the family's ranch house, there is the cook and housekeeper, the widowed Mrs. Norah Moore, who has been with the ranch for many years. She is ably assisted by her daughter Norine, in her late teens and described as being "Irish—and pretty." Being the only young and available female within miles, now and then she fans the flames in the romantically naive and inexperienced ranch hands. By the middle of the series, Nick Looker has edged out his fellows to become her main suitor, although for a time he has an earnest rival in one of the hands of 8 X 8 ranch. The rival disappears in the last volumes, but Nick still makes no progress with this Irish beauty.

The 8 X 8 ranch has its share of punchers too, but the singular character there is Bug Eye, whose interest in mechanical contraptions (usually jalopies put together from spare parts and junk) is matched only by his incompetence with them. He provides uncounted opportunities for comic relief, much like Chet Morton in the Hardy Boys series and Chow Winkler in the Tom Swift, Jr. series.

To be true to the West, the list of characters must include the boys' horses, Roy's Star and Teddy's Flash. These mounts are almost extensions of the boys' souls, and just about have the gift of reading their masters' minds. When they are rustled from Roy and Teddy on a few different occasions, the boys are able to ride other horses from the corral, but consarn it, it just ain't the same.

Though Nell and Curly have plenty of opportunity to see how shy the boys are when it comes to affection, Roy and Teddy show that they are tender souls after all when it comes to their horses.

When Flash gets mired in quicksand while trying to cross a river, Teddy stays with him at the risk of his own life. Roy and Star manage to rescue them by lassoing Flash and pulling them out, a process that leaves painful, burning welts on Flash's hide. Once the rescue is complete,

Roy slid from his pony, struck the ground, and pitched forward on his face. His legs seemed turned to straw. But he was up again in a moment and alongside Flash, soothing him, removing the rope with hands as gentle as those of a woman.

(*On Big Bison Trail*, page 135)

In a later book, the boys' devotion is made even more specific.

Teddy caressed his mount's neck. Roy did not hear his imploring whisper, "Do be careful where you step, Flash. You mean more to me than you'll ever know."

(*At Triangle Mine*, page 11)

THE RANCH

The description, size, and location of the X Bar X ranch are nowhere spelled out in detail, but much can be learned by sifting through many facts provided in the course of the series.

Bardwell Manley owned the X Bar X, a cattle ranch some thirty hours' ride "on the cars" west from Chicago on Rocky Run River, a small stream. This ranch had been in the Manley family since Temple Manley, the boys' grandfather, now several years dead, had settled there in 1868.

(*On the Ranch*, page 7)

Near the Rocky Run River, about thirty hours' train ride west of Chicago is the X Bar X ranch, devoted to the breeding and raising of fine cattle. It is the largest ranch in that part of the country.

(*Copperhead Gulch*, page 12)

[The ranch] was one of the finest and largest in that section of the country, and was located in a gently rolling region bounded by woods on the north and mountains on the south.

(*With the Secret Rangers*, page 2)

The Rocky Run River, "like a streak of dull silver, flows placidly through a border of cottonwoods and willows about half a mile from the ranch house" (*On the Ranch*, page 9). The river loses itself "a few miles farther on in the broader waters of the Whirlpool River" (*With the Secret Rangers*, page 2).

Although the location of the X Bar X ranch is revealed only in the most general terms, it is possible to narrow the possibilities down significantly. Each volume tells us that it is located thirty hours west of Chicago by train, but in *On Big Bison Trail*, we learn that the ranch is also eight days' ride north of "the border"—presumably the Mexican. From *Lost in the Rockies*, it is

evident that the eponymous mountain range is only a couple of days' ride away. This fact is confirmed in *Triangle Mine. Haunted Gully* tells us that the ranch "is located several hundred miles west of Chicago in a sparsely settled region" (page 11), and adds the new fact that the western border of the state is about 100 away (pages 34 and 42). However, the writing in this volume is slipshod and inconsistent, so this information is unhelpful.

If we assume that a train could cover about fifty miles an hour in the late 1920s, and figure that a horse could cover thirty miles a day—and more in a pinch (a figure given in *On the Ranch*, page 44 and *Copperhead Gulch*, page 218, which seems to be written by someone who knows about horses and ranching), we may conclude that the ranch is located somewhere in the south of Colorado. When we add the knowledge that Barbara Manley came from Denver and during the school year the boys attend the Hopper Academy just outside that city, and that Denver is mentioned in the series more than any other city except the local settlement of Eagles, the southern Colorado seems to be increasingly likely.

Just to nail it down tightly, it is reasonable to assume that the X Bar X ranch is not located in states which are named as being elsewhere. These include Montana in *On the Ranch* (pp. 25, 191) and Wyoming in the early volumes, New Mexico in *Branding the Wild Herd*, (page 4), and Nebraska in *Hunting the Prize Mustangs* (page 56). Since the escaped desperado in *Wild Herd* has come from New Mexico and is going north when he encounters the X Bar X boys, the identification with Colorado is virtually proven.

However, recent examination of correspondence by Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, dated in the later years of the series, reveal that the ranch was located in Montana. Indeed, in *The X Bar X Boys With the Border Patrol*, the Montana location is vital. Perhaps, like the location of the elusive Bayport, different authors and editors in different times provided information which can never be reconciled.

How large is the ranch? It takes about fifty to seventy-five miles of fencing to surround the spread (*At the Round Up*, page 155), which (by doing the math) implies that the ranch is very roughly 200,000 acres. If the ranch were a perfect circle, it would be about twenty miles in diameter. On those acres about 3600-3700 head of cattle roam (*At the Round Up*, page 161), though that figure varies from season to season.

As mentioned above, the nearest outpost of civilization is the town of Eagles, which is twelve miles away from the ranch, accessible by both horse and car. This is where the ranchers go for supplies and to meet the train, ship their cattle, and find such entertainment as there is. In the first volume of the series, we read,

Perhaps "town" would be dignifying Eagles beyond its merits. There was a main street, consisting of two restaurants, a post-office, six stores and the railroad station. A little way down the track was a large corral, used as a temporary retention place for dealers who sent their steers to this point to be shipped.

(*On the Ranch*, page 13)

Duck Rimor's Place is the name of one of the town's restaurants (in this case, read "saloon"), but the X Bar X ranchers usually go there only to confront bad guys.

A bit more information is given in later volumes:

Eagles, the nearest railroad station to the X Bar X ranch, was a small hamlet on the O. & D. branch of the railway. It was a one-street settlement with eight stores which catered to the needs of the ranches in that vicinity. From Eagles a wagon and auto road ran to the X Bar X, some twelve miles away. Halfway to the ranch it encircled Bitter Cliff and then went through the Big Woods at the northern of the ranch.

(*Copperhead Gulch*, page 34)

A number of dwelling houses, some of them scarcely more than huts, stood on either side of the long, straggling street.

(*With the Secret Rangers*, page 7)

In later volumes we learn that there is a movie theater in Eagles, and in *Haunted Gully* it even boasts a small airport. In *Following the Stampede*, the final volume, one haughty visitor calls it a "hick town."

THE BOOKS

Following are brief introductions to the plots of the twenty-one books and a depiction of the cover of each. Each book is also given a rating (admittedly completely subjective) in the categories of writing (which includes descriptive passages, conversations and use of dialogue, transitions, etc.), characterization (development and consistency of personalities, distinctiveness of individuals, moral shading of the good and bad guys, etc.), and plot (including plausibility of events, use of imagination, ability to hold interest, etc.). Marks are given using a scale of one to ten. The overall score is the average of the three marks.

1. *The X Bar X Boys on the Ranch (1926)*

The X Bar X boys ride into Eagles to meet their father, who is arriving by train after a week in "the city." They are bringing his horse, General. When they greet their father at the station, he introduces them to Nell and Ethel, whom he has met on the train and who are coming from New York to visit the neighboring 8 X 8 ranch. While they are talking, the boys' horses Flash and Star, along with General, are stolen. Gilly Froud, a former ranch hand on the X Bar X who had been fired for mistreating Flash, is suspected of the theft, along with a band of ne'er-do-wells he has gathered around him. When local ranches begin to lose cattle in large numbers, it is time for the X Bar X-ers to put an end to it.

Writing:	8
Characterization:	7
Plot:	6
Overall score:	7

2. *The X Bar X Boys in Thunder Canyon (1926)*

Belle Ada has gone to visit Nell and Ethel for a few days at the 8 X 8. The ranchers become concerned when all three girls fail to appear after they had set out in good time to come to the X Bar X to continue their visit there. When the news arrives that some of the rustlers, who had been put away at the end of the first volume, have escaped from the local jail, the hypothesis that the girls had been kidnapped is all but confirmed. The X Bar X boys, with punchers of both ranches,

follow the “claws” to locate and liberate the captives, whom they suspect have been detained deep in Thunder Canyon.

Writing: 8
 Characterization: 6
 Plot: 5
 Overall score: 6.33

3. *The X Bar X Boys on Whirlpool River (1926)*

It is learned that a recent hire at the X Bar X ranch named Joe Marino, a.k.a. the “Pup,” has a predilection for liquor. He’s had a bad influence on loyal ranch hand Gus Trippe, whose failure to mend breaks in the fence and watch the grazing cattle has allowed them to stray onto prime grazing land owned by neighbor Jake Trummer, thereby igniting sparks between Trummer and Bardwell Manley. In a subplot, Gus is disconsolate since he’s been waiting fruitlessly for an important letter. Gus and the Pup are fired, but in another subplot it becomes evident that one of them has left with \$600 from Bardwell Manley’s desk. The X Bar X crew must go find and round up their straying cattle alongside the beautiful but aptly-named Whirlpool River.

Writing: 9
 Characterization: 7
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 7.66

4. *The X Bar X Boys on Big Bison Trail (1927)*

A movie company decides to film a western at the X Bar X ranch and its vicinity. After shooting a few scenes on the ranch, the director decides to get some footage in the spectacular scenery along Big Bison Trail. Roy and Teddy, who had become friendly with the famous actors, are invited to act in some of the scenes. In a subplot, the boys try to track down a gorilla which had taken refuge from heavy rain in the same abandoned cabin in which the boys had sought shelter. In another subplot, ranch hand Nick Looker learns that he has inherited \$6000; however, an impostor is claiming the money.

Writing: 7
 Characterization: 6
 Plot: 5
 Overall score: 6

5. *The X Bar X Boys at the Round Up (1927)*

A pompous easterner, acting on behalf of a conglomerate, makes an outrageously high offer for some of Bardwell Manley’s prime cattle. Although noting that the man knows next-to-nothing about cattle, Mr. Manley nevertheless agrees to sell. It is curious, however, that the buyer insists on an unusual forfeiture section in the contract, and that the cattle be rounded up and delivered to a little-known and scarcely-used railway depot. A humorous incident involving a fortune-teller, several truly gratifying family scenes, and the action-packed conclusion make this a well-crafted book.

Writing: 9
 Characterization: 9
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 8.33

6. *The X Bar X Boys at Nugget Camp (1928)*

When the boys find an old miner who had been shot and left for dead, they bring him to the ranch for some tender loving care. When the old man is able to speak, he announces that he was robbed of about \$20,000 in gold; at about the same time, news arrives of a major gold strike at nearby

Nugget Camp. The ensuing gold rush causes many of the ranch hands to leave the X Bar X and other ranches for the site. The boys decide to join the rush and try to strike it rich while they look for the old miner's assailants and attempt to recover his nuggets.

Writing: 7
 Characterization: 7
 Plot: 6
 Overall score: 6.66

7. *The X Bar X Boys at Rustlers' Gap (1929)*

A large and well-organized band of cattle thieves, headed by an educated "easterner," is rustling cattle from the X Bar X, 8 X 8, and other local ranches. The rustlers are so skillful that Mr. Manley realizes that only a concerted effort by the ranchers will put an end to their tyranny. He organizes a large force to track and locate the rustlers and put them out of business for good. The trail leads into the magnificent but little-traveled terrain of the labyrinthine Rustlers' Gap.

Writing: 9
 Characterization: 7
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 7.66

8. *The X Bar X Boys at Grizzly Pass (1929)*

The few rustlers who escaped being captured at the end of the previous book come together and set out to exact revenge. Being slow learners, they cut a good number of cattle from the X Bar X herd, and head for the hills. The ranchers organize once again to track and foil the rustlers. In a subplot, the three girls, who are traveling to New York where Nell and Ethel come from, are among the passengers on a train which is stopped and robbed by masked men. The descriptions of blizzards are splendidly written. The conclusion is set in the wilds of Grizzly Pass.

Writing: 7
 Characterization: 7
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 7

9. *The X Bar X Boys Lost in the Rockies (1930)*

A solitary, peripatetic prospector is the joint owner of a section of rocky land with Bardwell Manley of the X Bar X ranch and Peter Ball of the 8 X 8 ranch. Although they considered it worthless, it is now sought after by The Great Divide Water Company for irrigation purposes, and who will pay top dollar for it. The sale must be consummated within thirty days, or the water company must take an option on another parcel; unfortunately, no one knows where the old prospector is—except that he is prospecting somewhere "in the Rockies." Roy and Teddy rush to find him, but, unknown to them, they are followed by men who wish to foil the sale.

Writing: 9
 Characterization: 8
 Plot: 8
 Overall score: 8.33

10. *The X Bar X Boys Riding for Life (1931)*

A new hand who has shown himself lazy and untrustworthy is given his walking papers by Bardwell Manley on the advice of the boys. After a particularly nasty and near-violent scene, he leaves, not without looting the Manleys of cash and jewelry in the middle of the night. The search for the culprit is hampered by a severe drought and scorching July weather, which also threatens about a thousand head of cattle. If this weren't enough, several range fires race across thousands

of acres and threaten the ranch house and the lives of all those connected with it. The boys and several of the hands, caught in the conflagration, are forced to ride for their lives.

Writing: 5
 Characterization: 4
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 5.33

11. *The X Bar X Boys in Smoky Valley (1932)*

Jacob Trant, a government inspector of ranches and their herds, is in residence at the X Bar X ranch. The boys, with several of the hands, are out gathering strays and herding their best shorthorns for shipment, when they meet a stranger, wounded and weak. In what the punchers conclude is delirium, he describes a band of outlaws who have set up in a valley distinguished by smoke and flame, and inhabited by “red monkeys” and giants who ride horses the size of elephants. Then a second stranger rides up and describes the same phenomena, adding a warning that the smoky valley is a good place to stay away from. These elements come together when the X Bar X, quickly followed by the 8 X 8, lose sizable numbers of their best shorthorns to rustlers, and the punchers of both ranches set out to recapture their prize cattle.

Writing: 5
 Characterization: 5
 Plot: 5
 Overall score: 5

12. *The X Bar X Boys at Copperhead Gulch (1933)*

In need of minor repair, the mail plane makes a forced landing at the X Bar X ranch. Roy and Teddy become friends with the aviator, Hank Dempsey, who offers them a joyride to Centralia, where the airport is located. The boys eagerly accept, having to go to Centralia anyway on business for their father. There they meet Larry Cobb, a fine rider who is ill and in need of a stay in the country to regain his health. At the boys’ invitation, he comes to the X Bar X for a long visit. In a subplot, he and the boys become involved in aiding an Italian expatriate who has bought a neighboring ranch; in his naiveté, he has hired shady ranch hands who intend to rob him blind and take over the ranch. Finally, when Hank’s plane is lost after a powerful storm near Copperhead Gulch, reputedly swarming with poisonous copperhead snakes, Roy, Teddy, and Larry set out to find their friend.

Writing: 7
 Characterization: 7
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 7

13. *The X Bar X Boys Branding the Wild Herd (1934)*

During a drought which is bringing thirsty strays down from the hills seeking water, the sheriff and two deputies arrive at the X Bar X ranch. They are looking for Pedro Lanza, a dangerous and desperate convict who has escaped from a jail in New Mexico. Roy and Teddy capture him early in the book, while noting during the chase that a bunch of unusual, wild cattle has also descended from the hills, seeking water during the drought. Since the steers are not branded and are of a type not known to the local ranchers, the boys set out to claim them for the X Bar X. The convict, however, has sworn never to forget that the boys had captured him, and has bragged that no jail yet has been able to hold him for long. In a subplot, Roy and Teddy are accused of rustling by a neighboring rancher who wants to claim the wild steers for his own. In another subplot, a college professor from the East asks the boys’ help in finding a treasure in gold which his uncle had hidden years earlier.

Writing: 7

Characterization: 7
 Plot: 8
 Overall score: 7.33

14. *The X Bar X Boys at the Strange Rodeo (1935)*

We meet a lot of the Manleys' neighbors in this volume, the first being their newest: Mr. Tyson is the new owner of the 4 Bar Circle ranch a few miles to the south of the X Bar X. He and his "adviser," Hal Draper, pay a call on Bardwell Manley to announce that Mr. Tyson is organizing a huge rodeo and county fair for all the local ranches. There will be shows and contests for all kinds of ranching skills, from riding to cooking to sewing. Punchers and womenfolk from miles around come in for the fun, including from the X Bar X. In a subplot, a worn-out horsewoman from a circus comes to rest up at the X Bar X, bringing with her a hidden tragic story. But when prize cattle begin to disappear, the serious adventures begin.

Writing: 5
 Characterization: 6
 Plot: 6
 Overall score: 5.66

15. *The X Bar X Boys With the Secret Rangers (1936)*

A lot of different events take place in this book. In the beginning, the boys ride to Eagles to pick up their long-awaited short-wave radio set, and are mightily put out when it is stolen within moments of their taking possession of it. While in Eagles they meet Barton Webster, who turns out to be a government secret ranger in search of a desperado named Blackjack Merton. From a man named Mr. Hardwick, Bardwell Manley and Peter Ball jointly purchase a ridge of land which they call Christmas Ridge, since they plan to sell its beautiful pines to a company which will distribute them as Christmas trees. When Roy and Teddy provide assistance to Barton Webster in tracking down Blackjack Merton, they learn that these apparently disconnected events come together.

Writing: 6
 Characterization: 6
 Plot: 5
 Overall score: 5.66

16. *The X Bar X Boys Hunting the Prize Mustangs (1937)*

When an epidemic threatens to decimate the best horses of the X Bar X ranch, Bardwell Manley sends his sons flying to an unfrequented but nearby canyon to find Handy Hale, an old man recently arrived in the area, living as a hermit and known for skill in treating sick animals. When the boys arrive, they find him at the point of being murdered by a big, fierce man named Jeff Northrup, from whom they rescue Mr. Hale. The reason for Northrup's antagonism to Hale is not revealed. Although the old man proves that he knows how to treat the sick animals with herbs found in a local canyon, more horses succumb to the fast-acting epidemic than are saved, and both the X Bar X and 8 X 8 ranches lose a number of their best broncos. After hearing a rumor that there are wild mustangs not too far away, Roy, Teddy, and Handy Hale set out to capture a number to replace the horses the ranches have lost. However, action is made very risky with the vicious Jeff Northrup in the background, sniping and otherwise causing serious trouble.

Writing: 7
 Characterization: 6
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 6.66

17. *The X Bar X Boys at Triangle Mine (1938)*

Roy and Teddy rescue Mr. Gregory, a man pinned under his horse, which has fallen and broken its neck. Since he was weakened by his ordeal, the boys take him to the X Bar X ranch to recover. There he reveals that he was bringing from his home in Denver to his recently widowed sister her title deed to a zinc mine. Her mine is one of three in close proximity to each other which together are called Triangle Mine. Unless she can prove her title by the first of the following month, her property will be taken over and she will be destitute. However, the deed was lost or stolen while the man was vulnerable, apparently by a traveling companion who has been proven false. Once he recovers his strength, the man takes off to track down the man responsible. Having business for their father in the vicinity of Triangle Mine, and being concerned about the welfare of their recent guest, the boys follow.

Writing: 8
 Characterization: 6
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 7

18. *The X Bar X Boys and the Sagebrush Mystery (1939)*

A movie company selects the X Bar X as the site for its next feature film, "The Sagebrush Mystery," thereby angering One-Arm Kosty, the caretaker of the Z II ranch which was first considered. Kosty tries to persuade the director to change his mind; when he is unsuccessful, he sets out to ruin the production through a series of moves which progress from nuisance to criminal. In a subplot, the 14-year-old star of the movie turns out to be the son whom Kosty had abandoned years before. Things really get complicated when the boy is kidnapped.

Writing: 1
 Characterization: 1
 Plot: 1
 Overall score: 1

19. *The X Bar X Boys in the Haunted Gully (1940)*

The buildings of the X Bar X ranch need to be painted. When Nick Looker goes into Eagles to buy the paint, he meets Henry Huffner, a housepainter in need of work, and brings him back to the ranch to do the job. While Roy and Teddy are helping him on the first day, Henry tells them about overhearing a couple of hoboes describing a place called Haunted Gully, also known as Dead Men's Gully. It is an obscure place west of the ranch, where, according to legend, a treasure is hidden. When the hoboes steal Peter Ball's car, and clues indicate that they have taken it to the vicinity of Haunted Gully, the boys decide to take the legend seriously and look for the treasure. In a subplot, during a storm Roy and Teddy discover a box containing some property of George Robinson, a medical doctor from New York who had disappeared in the vicinity two years earlier. The boys contact his grieving daughter, who comes to the ranch grasping at the slight hope that her father may be found.

Writing: 3
 Characterization: 2
 Plot: 2
 Overall score: 2.33

20. *The X Bar X Boys and the Lost Troopers (1941)*

The U.S. Army has built a fort not far from the ranch, and troopers are coming in to man it. To provide mounts for his men, the Captain purchases a few horses from the X Bar X and the 8 X 8 ranches. In the course of delivering the horses to the fort, Roy and Teddy meet a couple of troopers who indicate that they are unhappy with army life and want to desert. Shortly thereafter, they disappear, having been helped away from the fort unwittingly by the X Bar X boys. Feeling partially responsible, Roy and Teddy dedicate themselves to finding the missing men. In a

subplot, an old man who is injured in an avalanche asks the boys to find his long-lost partner and restore to him \$5,000 which he had entrusted to the old man's keeping. The money is stolen, giving the boys two mysteries to solve.

Writing: 3
 Characterization: 3
 Plot: 4
 Overall score: 3.33

21. *The X Bar X Boys Following the Stampede (1942)*

The Manley boys meet Leon McCabe, who through correspondence has bought a local ranch from Ora Radell. Roy and Teddy accompany McCabe to his new ranch with some misgivings, since Radell is noted in the locale as an unsavory and dishonest character. Their fears prove well-founded, as the ranch is in a state of abandonment and disrepair. The situation worsens when another "new owner" shows up with his wife and six children. Shortly after that, a third man appears with a deed to land sold him by Radell, but is actually a part of the X Bar X ranch. In a subplot, a detective appears in search of a box of jewels which has been stolen and traced to the vicinity.

Writing: 7
 Characterization: 7
 Plot: 7
 Overall score: 7

22. *The X Bar X Boys With the Border Patrol (unpublished)*

In the 1980s, the archives of the Stratemeyer Syndicate were deposited in the New York Public Library, and, after being catalogued, were made available in the fall of 1998 to the public under certain conditions. Early in 1999 I learned that an eight-page, typewritten, chapter-by-chapter summary exists of the unpublished 22nd volume of the X Bar X Boys series. I requested a copy of this document, and permission to post a brief summary of the story line on this web site. The New York Public Library sent me the document and granted this permission, provided the proper credit lines appear in connection with the material. They appear at the end of this section. Readers of this summary may be as surprised as I was to learn that the "border" in *Border Patrol* is not the Mexican border, but the Canadian border!

The story begins with Roy and Teddy Manley riding with singing ranch hand Ranny Brown. He tells the boys that he going to leave the X Bar X Ranch and join a circus owned by a man named Jim Rutter. After they have returned to the ranch, Mr. Manley informs his sons that he is interested in adding a small new herd to his cattle. A man named Elias Parker, whose ranch is in southern Alberta, is giving up ranching to pursue mining. He has been building up a special breed of cattle by crossing Australian and Scottish strains. The boys beg to join their father who decides to drive up to Alberta to inspect the herd. At the border they meet an Immigration Patrol Inspector named Peter Brown, called "Pike Pete," who hails from Colorado. He relates to the Manleys that there has been a high incidence of pelt smuggling across the border.

At the ranch, Mr. Manley decides to purchase the herd. Arrangements are made to drive the cattle to the border, where the herd will be met by ranchers from the X Bar X. Returning home, they stop for customs inspection where a stowaway is detected. He is one of the ranch hands of Elias Parker's ranch. He escapes into the night.

The Manleys return home and make plans to return to meet the Canadian herd at the border. Before leaving, the boys track investigate a campfire not far from the Ranch. Although it is deserted when they locate it, a pelt from a Canadian otter rests nearby. The boys take it back to

the ranch, not knowing they are followed by two sinister figures. Shortly after arriving, Teddy is jumped, the pelt is taken, and the assailants makes good their escape. In daylight, the boys learn that the assailants' trail leads to a cabin, then unoccupied. They find and keep a list of smuggled pelts sold, with prices received for them.

A day or two later, after a farewell party for Ranny, the boys accompany him to the train station in Eagles, where they see a "wanted poster" featuring the visage of one of the assailants. He is described as a horse and cattle thief. The boys inform the sheriff that he is probably a smuggler as well. After meeting Nell and Curley at the station, with some boys from New York, the Manley boys invite the Eastern boys to join them on a ride to assist a geologist, also from New York, look for specimens. On the ride, they catch a glimpse of the Canadian who had tried to stow away in their car.

The next morning they wire Pike Pete of their sighting of the stowaway. Pete wires Inspector Jack Hobson, another agent, who is not far from the X Bar X Ranch. Roy and Teddy take him out to the place where they had seen the Canadian. On the search, Jack locates a cave with pelts in it, but no men. After a few adventures, the men are captured, the pelts turned over to the government, the New Yorkers continue their explorations, and Roy and Teddy join the ranchers to head for the Canadian border to meet Elias Parker's herd. On the trip, they read in the paper that the circus train, which Ranny had joined, had been wrecked and many wild animals had escaped. Several lions, tigers, and leopards are loose in the area not far from the border where the Parker herd is expected.

Although delayed by a rider named Will Watson, who had joined their bunch for a day or so, the X Bar X men arrive at the border and wait for the Parker herd. After it is long late, they call Parker, who expresses concern, since the herd had left his ranch on time. He informs the boys of the trail his cattle took, and they decide to start from both ends and meet in the middle, looking for the missing cattle. They meet the next day with no sign of the herd. Since the trail is frequently used, searching for footprints is not useful. Parker decides to contact the Canadian Border Police, and the Manley brothers decide that Watson is probably one of the rustler gang. They also suspect that the rustled herd is on the U.S. side of the border, since the stowaway was heading across the border.

After contacting the U.S. Border Patrol, the boys learn that that office is particularly overworked with three different rustling gangs, two agents out with wounds, and the escaped circus animals. The Manley are invited to help out, and accept the invitation. Circus owner Jim Rutter arrives and pleads that his animals be captured alive. The boys ask that Ranny be allowed to help them, and Rutter agrees. The boys and Ranny proceed to capture a lion, find the place where the rustled herd were turned off the main trail, and learn that the herd was taken to a railroad siding and shipped somewhere. Next they locate the cabin where the Parker ranch hands had been held captive and free them with the help of the R.C.M.P.

The railway company reports that there were no cattle cars on their train, so the boys conclude that the derailed circus cars had been commandeered by the rustlers, probably to take the cattle a short distance. A search finds cattle tracks five miles from the siding, and the boys and their companions follow them. However, a heavy rain obliterates the tracks. With effort the tracks are picked up and lost several times. After several adventures, the boys, with Ranny, spy, through binoculars, a group of hard-looking men, one of whom appeared in the wanted poster in Eagles. Overhearing that other smugglers plan to attack the boys' friends at their camp, Ranny and the boys rush back in time to capture two ambushers. These confess that the smugglers and the rustlers had joined forces and were operating on both sides of the border.

Joined by two Mounties, two Border Patrolmen, and the animal-keeper from the circus, the group returns to the canyon where the rustlers' camp was located. They are still looking for the missing herd. The Mounties turn back at the border, and on the U.S. side the rest of the patrol soon locates herd's tracks. The Border Patrol reports that all escaped circus animals have been captured except a leopard who is tame. After several adventures, Roy and Teddy locate a camouflaged cabin in which the rest of gang is hidden, with the herd secreted nearby in a cave. The boys are captured and taken inside the cabin. Inspector Jack tracks the boys to the cabin, accompanied by several of the X Bar X ranchers. While the good guys ponder how to rescue the boys, the leopard appears. The animal handler rushes to the cabin, shouting that the leopard will not let any one out alive. The boys realize this is the tame beast and tell their captors that they would rather face the leopard than remain captive. They rush out to freedom. The X Bar X men then capture the rustlers, and the stolen herd is freed. All the other bad guys are captured, and the herd is taken to the X Bar X. Ranny decides to leave the circus and return to the Ranch.

**STRATEMEYER SYNDICATE RECORDS
MANUSCRIPTS AND ARCHIVES DIVISION
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX AND TILDEN FOUNDATIONS**

THE MANLEYS: A FUNCTIONAL FAMILY

The Manley family is rare, both in the real world and the world of series books. There is sincere affection in the family, far more than in any other series I've ever read, and beautifully presented. It is unusual in that its protagonists, the brothers Manley, although just 15 and 16, are given a huge measure of independence without having their parents written out of the books through being dead, kidnapped, in a foreign country, or away on business. Even Belle Ada at age 12 is given a little independence and freedom—at least in the early books. Their father trusts the boys to run the ranch; indeed, they take turns for a week at a time in managing its affairs in every way. Roy and Teddy have a loving and manly relationship with their father, expressed with the kind of affection that most people, even today's teenagers, would really like to have from their parents and rarely get. Throughout the series, we also see the love which the husband and wife share, expressed in tenderness and respect.

No, in this series, "absent parents" are neither needed nor desired. The boys have responsibility, trust, and affection, all in balance. Pages 62-64 of *At the Round Up* describe a family meal in which the boys discuss the coming rodeo in which they wish to compete. The parents are encouraging, supportive, truly interested, and concerned for the boys' safety while giving them the dignity of making their own decisions.

Much later in the same book, there is this remarkable and moving scene of the father's affection for his sons:

Mr. Manley chuckled and rested a hand on a shoulder of each of his sons.

"I was just thinkin', boys, that soon you'll be wantin' to run this ranch yourselves. You can, too. You've grown up, both of you. Grown up into sons I can be proud of." Abruptly his manner

changed, and he pulled them toward him affectionately. "Hit the hay now, buckers! You're not too old for me to spank if you stay up too late!" Laughing, he released them. "Up early to-morrow. Plenty to do. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, Dad!"

Halfway up the stairs Teddy paused.

"I think," he said slowly, "that dad is a regular fellow. I'd do anything for him."

Roy replied with a single sentence, but so fervent was it that it seemed almost like a prayer:

"I'll tell a maverick he is!"

And they continued to their room.

(page 113)

The contrast with Fenton Hardy is almost painful, who expresses almost no emotion or affection to his sons whatever, except in a mild professional partnership. It's no mystery why Joe can't get close to Iola, and Frank remains respectful but aloof from Callie. The primary exception to Fenton's lack of expression is in the D-minus book *The Disappearing Floor* when he thinks the boys have been killed in a crack up, but even this is presented in an artificial and anonymous fashion, and much too late.

"My boys! My boys!" sobbed a voice in the thick woods outside, around a bend in the rutted country lane.

A figure in wrinkled clothing stood with bowed head before the ruins of the Hardy brothers' automobile. Long and sorrowfully the man stared at the wreckage as a slight breeze stirred in the trees towering overhead.

"Gone ... forever." The drawn lips formed the words soundlessly.

At length the figure turned and wet-eyed trudged away.

(*The Disappearing Floor*, pages 144-145)

One would think that a great detective like Fenton Hardy would notice that there were no signs of any injury or bloodletting in the wreck, and that there is no evidence anywhere that his sons have been injured at all, much less fatally.

VIRTUE AND HUMOR

The first nine books establish the high moral code of the West by which the decisions and attitudes on the X Bar X ranch are defined. The pillars of this code include respecting a man's privacy if he wants to keep his own counsel, supporting him if he asks for help, generosity to one's friends, fairness to one's enemies, scrupulous honesty in all dealings, accepting good fortune and bad as it comes your way, unquestioned loyalty to the boss, justice without vengeance, helping your neighbor while respecting his fences, hospitality to friends and strangers alike, and expecting the best from others while showing mercy when you don't get it. These virtues are the constant background to the action in these books, and mark its distinguishing characteristics. The code lags in some of the later books, and is seriously compromised in volumes 10 and 11, but is never completely eclipsed.

The philosophy behind these attitudes is rarely spelled out, but examples of the virtues are so abundant throughout the first nine volumes, and noticeable in the remainder, that they can easily be distilled from the action. In *On Big Bison Trail*, for example, one of the subplots involves Nick Looker, who is troubled when an impostor tries to claim an inheritance which is rightfully his. The casual record-keeping of the West makes the outcome doubtful. Although Nick is obviously disturbed, his fellows leave him alone until he is ready to tell them the problem. Once they are made aware of the need, they put enormous effort into seeing justice done. When Nick is offered an easy way to the inheritance by a crooked lawyer, he never wavers in his determination to get it honestly or not at all. Finally, once he comes out on top, he shares his bounty with his friends by "losing" to them through a poker game so as to preserve their dignity.

The series is notable also for strong doses of humor. Bunk house capers and family fun frequent most of the stories, not vital to the plot but essential for setting the atmosphere of the X Bar X ranch. The discriminating reader may detect a parallel to the hijinks of the boys in the early Hardy Boys series. The events described are not just comic relief but also provide the setting for important character development. The individuals are carefully and consistently sketched, and are well-delineated, with their personalities distinct and usually maintained throughout the series. The first nine volumes masterfully present this facet of the X Bar X series, but many of the later volumes maintain it admirably.

Focusing on the first nine volumes, we note that the humor is a tongue-in-cheek and clever style, sometimes subtle, usually evident in times of stress in the plot, and always wry. These excerpts from *On Whirlpool River* provide a few examples from an enormous store in the writing.

If they did come upon the bear, by great good luck Roy might succeed in placing a shot through the eye into the brain, which was the only place where the small bullet would be effective. If he missed—well, several things might happen, and not all of them to the bear.

(page 4)

"Who, me?" Nick's face expressed hurt surprise, "What have I done, boss?"

"Well, outside of lettin' our Durhams wander over on Jake Trummer's land and making' him come over here fit to be tied, I guess nothin.' But we all have our own ideas, an' mine, strange as it may seem, is that when a man's set to ridin' cattle, he's supposed to ride 'em, and not let 'em mess up a neighbor's grazin' ground."

(pages 26-27)

"The Pup ain't worth the powder to blow him up, though I'd chip in my little bit to stand part of the expense if any one wanted to try it," he chuckled.

(page 97)

In *At the Round Up*, when two shady characters try to pump one of the ranch hands about Bardwell Manley's business affairs, we learn that he

"told 'em that we had fifty head of shorthorns that were being shipped to the King of Siam, in trade for a herd of elephants. He

said that we were going to start an elephant farm out here and grow ivory for our own pool balls.”

(page 4)

When Roy is teased about his affection for Nell when the girls visit the X Bar X, he quickly takes the luggage up the front steps of the house, abandoning the welcoming crowd. Teddy is urged to “go and console him. He’ll set fire to the house with that face of his.” (*At the Round Up*, page 46)

When Roy teases his sister about some romance novel she is reading, Belle Ada exclaims, “Don’t go snooping into my affairs! I guess I can read what books I want to.” Her mother corrects her, “Within limits, my dear... It wouldn’t do for you to feed on too much silly fiction, you know. Upstairs I have a volume of essays by famous writers.” (*At the Round Up*, page 43)

In this incident, one has a definite impression that author James Cody Ferris is taking a very rare opportunity to laugh at himself and the readers of series books. Why, if Mrs. Manley’s attitude had been common, series books would have been read under covers at night with a flashlight, and librarians and educators would have denounced them as unwholesome! It is a tongue-in-cheek joke in a work of series book fiction. It is especially enjoyable to the series book fans of today, similar to the unintentional irony when Frank and Joe find a rare book in “an old second-hand book shop”! (*The Twisted Claw*, pages 13-14)

THE WRITING

By far the best writing in the series is found in the first nine volumes. Although the opportunities for plotting are limited (see the section of this web site called “The Flaw”), the books often have one or two subplots going in addition to the main story. Sometimes, like an Indiana Jones or James Bond movie, the tale begins with a two-chapter adventure—such as when the boys were caught in a landslide (*In Thunder Canyon*), cornered by a bear (*On Whirlpool River*), or lost in a blizzard (*At Grizzly Pass*).

In most of the books, there is plenty of occasion for flying bullets, and the X Bar X boys get flesh wounds once in a while, and sustain bullet holes in their hats and sleeves. A few bad guys do get wounded in the hand or leg, and a few good guys get creased, but those who aim to kill “cain’t hit the side of a barn,” and those who can shoot accurately don’t aim to kill. So there is plenty of gun totin’, with rifles carried on saddles, six-shooters in holsters, and full cartridge belts, but the only death-dealing is done to wolves, bears, rattlesnakes, and wildcats, and then only to save lives.

The dialogue of the characters is mostly a well-crafted western slang, but—in the early books at least—with the occasional sign of “upper class” vocabulary. Strangely, the two styles don’t jar, but rather add flavor to the books. For example, in *On Whirlpool River*, one of the punchers says, “That’s enough, Roy. We’ll do the rest. There ain’t no need for you to elucidate” (page 72). The X Bar X series is the only one I’ve run across which seriously puts words like “‘Twas” and “‘Tisn’t” into the mouths of its characters, and couples words like “exigencies” with words like “ain’t” and “reckon.”

This author’s skill is not exhausted by his ability to produce scenes of complex but believable humor, or his savvy in developing the personalities of numerous characters, or in stitching together dialogue that could never have been spoken anywhere on earth. In many ways, he comes to his peak when he pulls at the reader’s heart with majestic descriptions of the boys’

surroundings. The writing is frequently spectacular, never repetitive, and holds its own among even the best of other series book writing.

The day was drawing to a close. The few clouds in the deep blue sky had gathered on the horizon, like white sheep flocking to the fold. The orange and yellow colors of early sunset were already streaking the heavens. A bird, flying low, left a streamer of purling song behind him.

The landscape was dotted with water-holes, some of them dried up from the long summer sun, others containing only moisture enough to cover the bottom. As the boys rode on, Bitter Cliff lookout came into view, and then it was only a half hour to the X Bar X ranch.

(At the Round Up, page 7)

The day grew colder as the sun approached the horizon. Gradually the mountains took on that bluish tint that heralds the twilight. The moon arose, a placid, washed-out circlet in the azure sky. As the day darkened, the moon became brighter, and when it finally shone, an incandescent orb, Teddy arose. Night had come.

(At the Round Up, page 106)

It was a desolate tract, that last range of Red Rock Mountain. The slope, which rose gently at first and farther on more steeply, was dotted here and there with trees that had been burned almost leafless by summer suns. The land on the incline lay completely open to the brazen sky. It had long since been beaten into submission and only half-heartedly ventured to try to produce anything in the way of vegetation.

(At Rustlers' Gap, page 181)

At last, after an hour, the bombardment of thunder subsided and the lightning grew less livid. The wind stopped suddenly, as if someone had shut off an electric fan. Then it began to blow again softly, whining and sobbing in the tops of the trees and soughing through the sodden leaves that dripped continuously like the patter of a rapid-fire gun.

(At Rustlers' Gap, page 187)

Faster and thicker came the snow. Louder and higher shrieked the wind, as it whipped the flakes into fantastic shapes that seemed to Teddy to be pushing against him and trying to keep him from going forward.

... The two boys rode out of the grove and into the teeth of the howling gale. There were only slight traces of the trail, and they had to trust to luck as they started down the open mountainside. The fierce norther blew the snow in their faces and eyes and blinded them, cutting their cheeks with sharp particles of ice.

... The wind had now risen to a ninety-mile gale which blew the light, dry snow in great, whirling eddies in every direction. It was possible to see but a few feet ahead, and the winding trail was covered with little drifts which, in places, blotted out the path and covered the dangerous gullies with which the trail was intersected.

(*At Grizzly Pass*, pages 3, 9, 11)

Though such evocative writing is scarce in subsequent volumes, it is not altogether absent.

Twilight on the prairie is a long time coming when there are no hills behind which the sun may quickly disappear. That night, however, the sky was beginning to be overcast with a mass of steel-gray clouds. Long, thick outriders of a coming storm, black with strings of fluffy white vapor flapped across the heavens like huge bats out for their nocturnal parade.

(*Copperhead Gulch*, page 60)

Gradually they were nearing a wildly picturesque mountain range. Ahead of them was a veritable forest of pine trees. The road led through it.

"Isn't this great?" Roy shouted. There was a green dusk under the wide-spreading branches. The only sound they could hear was made by rushing, tumbling water, and that was not very near.

"Sounds like a cascade over on a mountain," Roy exclaimed.

Then through an opening he beheld a view so beautiful he drew rein to gaze at it. The forest ended abruptly at the edge of a narrow, though deep, ravine. Beyond rose the jagged gray wall of a mountain. Over its side from a great height a waterfall tumbled. ... For many moments he stood there admiring the waterfall with its rainbow of colors in the setting sun.

(*At Triangle Mine*, page 68-69)

THE FLAW

With all of its charms and strengths, the X Bar X series has a serious built-in flaw: the setting provides only limited possibilities for plots. The action is always centered on the ranch, and the largest close center for any kind of activity is the little town of Eagles. That leaves little opportunity for excitement beyond riding, resisting rustlers, rodeos, round-ups, and ranch life, gold and girls, storms and scenery. After a while, it can get a little monotonous. The style of the series really forbids that the boys journey elsewhere.

Other series are more flexible, and their action is transferable. Ken Holt and Sandy Allen go to Colorado (were they near the X Bar X ranch?), Mexico, and other exotic places; Rick Brant spends about two-thirds of his books outside the country; Tom Quest gets around a few times; Don Sturdy of course is *never* home, once he manipulates his father into getting him out of the clutches of his hand-wringing mother; and the Hardy Boys get their share of frequent flyer miles even in the original text versions. But there could never be any titles like *The X Bar X Boys in*

Argentina or *The X Bar X Boys Ride the Tundra*. (However, see the entry for *With the Border Patrol* in the section called “The Books.”)

As an unfortunate corollary to this, there is little variety in criminal possibilities. Mostly there is rustling, rustling, and more rustling. There is occasionally a little extra excitement when the boys deal with fraud, theft, missing persons, or kidnapping, or face danger from weather and animal predators, but you’re not going to find Roy and Teddy riding Star and Flash on the outskirts of Chicago or packing their gear for long trips on ship or plane.

This means that, to keep the plots going, what the criminal element lacks in imagination and when it isn’t around, will have to be made up for by Adventure in the Great West. Too often, perhaps, Adventure has to carry the stories about as much as any mystery to be solved or crime to be thwarted or punished. Admittedly this is often skillfully done, but after a while, the reading can get to drag a little. Sometimes the plots stretch a long way to introduce mystery or excitement, and the stretch is just not always enough to work. Perusing the entire series may be better done over time, with breaks in between the books.

THE AUTHORS

The name after each title in the X Bar X Boys series is James Cody Ferris. Since the series was a Stratemeyer production, we know that this is a pseudonym, doubtless purposely reminiscent of William Cody, a.k.a. Buffalo Bill. There are at least two individuals involved the actual authorship of the volumes produced by the Stratemeyer Syndicate: the person who originated the story and wrote the plot in summary form, and the ghostwriter who penned the words from the summary. Until the files of the Stratemeyer Syndicate were opened by the New York Public Library to researchers (see the section of this web site called “The Phantom Title, Etc.”), the best one could do was use internal evidence in the stories to make an educated guess as to the ghostwriter. The words you are reading now were written June 6, 1999, and publicize the fruit of the initial researches in this area of James Keeline and his friend Geoff Lapin, both of whom have had access to the Stratemeyer files; James has shared their discoveries with me whenever they involved the X Bar X Boys series. James provided the information for volumes 1-10 and 21-22, and Geoff provided it for volumes 11-20. I am grateful to James, and through him to Geoff, for kindly sharing their research with me. This new article replaces the educated guesses I made and publicized in 1998, before these files became accessible.

Although my guesses were right in a few cases, I have had to make many revisions—sometimes reluctantly, I must admit. Internal evidence had to be squared with the information in the Stratemeyer files, and in a couple of places I had to be convinced. Although there are two “unknowns” in the list of outliners, James has patiently convinced me of the accuracy of the names which his and Geoff’s research has discovered. It is remotely possible that new evidence may surface as research continues. For example, if we learn that one ghostwriter was initially given the outline (as indicated in Stratemeyer files) but couldn’t or wouldn’t write the story, and someone else did, then this would change who really wrote a particular book. This kind of information will emerge from studying the correspondence from a particular time period—a very time-consuming procedure.

Another factor which can introduce variations in the writing is the length and detail of the manuscript. As Edward Stratemeyer’s daughters, Harriet and Edna, became more experienced in the business, they supplied more complete outlines to the ghostwriters, and applied a heavier hand

in editing the result. Ghostwriters, depending on how busy they were at the time of writing, could supply a manuscript of varying length or quality, which might need rewriting.

According to the information in the Stratemeyer files, the outliners and ghostwriters of the books of the X Bar X Boys series are as follows. The biographical information was provided by James Keeline.

Outliners: .

Edward Stratemeyer, Volumes 1-10.

The X Bar X Boys on the Ranch (1926).

The X Bar X Boys in Thunder Canyon (1926).

The X Bar X Boys on Whirlpool River (1926) .

The X Bar X Boys on Big Bison Trail (1927) .

The X Bar X Boys at the Round Up (1927) .

The X Bar X Boys at Nugget Camp (1928) .

The X Bar X Boys at Rustlers' Gap (1929) .

The X Bar X Boys at Grizzly Pass (1929) .

The X Bar X Boys Lost in the Rockies (1930) .

The X Bar X Boys Riding for Life (1931) .

Edward Stratemeyer (1862-1930) was the founder of the Stratemeyer Syndicate. In addition to managing the business and plotting most of the early books it produced, he wrote under his own name and two main personal pseudonyms, "Arthur M. Winfield" and "Capt. Ralph Bonehill."

Howard Garis, Volume 11.

The X Bar X Boys in Smoky Valley (1932) .

Howard Roger Garis (1873-1962) was the most prolific ghostwriter for the Syndicate, with more than 285 book-length manuscripts, and was a close friend of Edward Stratemeyer. His son Roger told of how Edward and Howard would act out scenes from books to make sure that they made sense. Some of the major series for which Garis contributed volumes include the Motor Boys series (1-22), Great Marvel series (1-5, 8-9), Jack Ranger series (2-6), Tom Swift series (1-24, 28-36, 38), Bobbsey Twins series (4-28), and many others. In addition to his incredible Syndicate work, Garis created the Uncle Wiggily stories about a rheumatic gentleman rabbit which were syndicated in newspapers across the country on a weekly basis for more than fifty years (between 1910 and 1962). He also invented the Uncle Wiggily board game which was a best-selling children's game for several decades.

Edna Camilla Stratemeyer Squier, Volumes 12-13, 15-16, 18-20

The X Bar X Boys at Copperhead Gulch (1933)

The X Bar X Boys Branding the Wild Herd (1934)

The X Bar X Boys With the Secret Rangers (1936)

The X Bar X Boys Hunting the Prize Mustangs (1937)

The X Bar X Boys and the Sagebrush Mystery (1939)

The X Bar X Boys in the Haunted Gully (1940)

The X Bar X Boys and the Lost Trooper s (1941)

Edna Camilla Stratemeyer Squier (1895-1974) was the youngest daughter of Edward Stratemeyer and Magdalene Baker Van Camp Stratemeyer (1867-1935). After Edward's death in 1930, Edna and her elder sister, Harriet Stratemeyer Adams (1892-1982), first tried (unsuccessfully) to sell the Syndicate, then began to run it themselves. Edna was the Syndicate's most prolific outliner, creating twice as many as Harriet did. She also wrote one volume in the Kay Tracey series (13). After 1942, she moved to Florida and became a silent partner in the Syndicate.

Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, Volumes 14 and 17

The X Bar X Boys at the Strange Rodeo (1935)

The X Bar X Boys at Triangle Mine (1938)

Harriet Stratemeyer Adams (1892-1982) was the eldest daughter of Edward Stratemeyer and eventually became the CEO of the Syndicate. For the most part, her early work was centered around managing the writing of others. However, she began writing extensively for the Syndicate after Edna left in 1942. She wrote most of the later volumes of the Nancy Drew series (31, 35-59), many in the Bobbsey Twins series (36-40, 42-48), and many in the Dana Girls series (18-30), among others.

Unknown, Volumes 21-22

The X Bar X Boys Following the Stampede (1942)

The X Bar X Boys With the Border Patrol (not published)

Ghostwriters:

Roger Garis, Volumes 1-6

The X Bar X Boys on the Ranch (1926)

The X Bar X Boys in Thunder Canyon (1926)

The X Bar X Boys on Whirlpool River (1926)

The X Bar X Boys on Big Bison Trail (1927)

The X Bar X Boys at the Round Up (1927)

The X Bar X Boys at Nugget Camp (1928)

Roger Carroll Garis (1901-1967) was the son of Howard Roger Garis (1873-1962) and Lilian C. McNamara Garis (1873-1954). He wrote several books for the Syndicate, including volumes in the Nat Ridley series (5, 14-16), Bobby Blake series (12), and Randy Starr series (1-2). He wrote a memoir of his family's writing career called *My Father Was Uncle Wiggily* (published by McGraw-Hill, 1966).

Frank Dorrance Hopley, Volumes 7-12

The X Bar X Boys at Rustlers' Gap (1929)

The X Bar X Boys at Grizzly Pass (1929)

The X Bar X Boys Lost in the Rockies (1930)

The X Bar X Boys Riding for Life (1931)

The X Bar X Boys in Smoky Valley (1932)

The X Bar X Boys at Copperhead Gulch (1933)

Frank Dorrance Hopley (1872-1933) wrote volumes in the Bob Chase series (1-5) and Jerry Ford series (1-4). He also wrote one book published under his own name called *At the Crossroads* (published by Augustana Book Concern, 1931). A letter in *The Mystery and Adventure Series Review*, Volume 22, page 29, revealed Hopley's existence for the first time and listed the date of his death as 1930; however, later research in the Stratemeyer files indicates that he died in August 1933.

Walter Karig, Volume 13

The X Bar X Boys Branding the Wild Herd (1934)

Walter Karig (1898-1956) was a Captain in the U.S. Navy and wrote a number of books referring to World War II. He was also an author of television scripts for war-related programs like "Victory At Sea." For the Syndicate, he wrote volumes in the Perry Pierce series (2-4), Doris Force series (3-4), and Nancy Drew series (8-10). He earned a bad reputation with the Syndicate by writing to the Library of Congress and requesting authorial credit for the three Nancy Drew volumes he wrote. The Library staff assumed that he wrote all of the books. Both the fact that he revealed himself as "Carolyn Keene" and the mistake on the part of the library catalogers were a

source of tremendous consternation for the Syndicate. At one point, Harriet S. Adams wrote to Mildred Wirt (the author of the first 25 volumes in the Nancy Drew series, except for the three written by Karig) and said that the Syndicate would rue the day that they ever hired Karig, and that if anyone could claim to be “Carolyn Keene” it would be Wirt.

Grace May North Monfort, Volumes 14, 16-17

The X Bar X Boys at the Strange Rodeo (1935)

The X Bar X Boys Hunting the Prize Mustangs (1937)

The X Bar X Boys at Triangle Mine (1938)

Grace May North Monfort (1876-1960) was born in Utica, New York and between 1919 and 1931 wrote a number of books under her own name as well as her personal pseudonym, “Carol Norton.” In addition to the three volumes in the X Bar X Boys series, she wrote a short series of unpublished western stories for young children, called the “Southwest Stories for Children.” This is the first indication of any kind that she wrote for the Syndicate.

John W. Duffield, Volume 15

The X Bar X Boys With the Secret Rangers (1936)

John W. Duffield was a particularly prolific ghostwriter for the Syndicate, including volumes in the Radio Boys series (1-12), Bomba the Jungle Boy series (1-20 and one unpublished), and the Ted Scott series (1-12, 15-20). He lived in Queens, New York. His daughter, Elizabeth D. Ward, also wrote extensively for the Syndicate. Before writing for the Syndicate, he created the Bert Wilson series under his own name and wrote volumes in a Boy Scout series under the “Maitland” pseudonym.

Dr. John Conyers Button Jr., Volumes 18-21

The X Bar X Boys and the Sagebrush Mystery (1939)

The X Bar X Boys in the Haunted Gully (1940)

The X Bar X Boys and the Lost Troopers (1941)

The X Bar X Boys Following the Stampede (1942)

Dr. John Conyers Button, Jr. (1911-1967) was mainly known as a physician who specialized in Parkinson’s Disease. He was born in Hackensack, New Jersey and maintained a general practice in medicine and surgery between 1938 and 1958 in Newark and Maplewood, New Jersey, including the Button Neurological Institute (1949-1958). He also wrote five volumes in the Hardy Boys series (17-21).

Leslie McFarlane, Volume 22

The X Bar X Boys With the Border Patrol (not published)

Leslie McFarlane (1902-1977), a prolific Canadian writer, is best known to series book fans as the author of the early Hardy Boys series (1-16, 22-26). He wrote several volumes in the Dave Dashaway series for the Syndicate under the pseudonym “Roy Rockwood” before becoming “Franklin W. Dixon.” He also wrote the first four volumes in the Dana Girls series, and the phantom title in the X Bar X Boys series. He wrote of his experience in the Syndicate in his autobiographical work, *Ghost of the Hardy Boys* (published by Methuen in 1976).

With this information provided, it is helpful to reflect a little on the internal evidence of the stories. The first nine volumes inaugurate the series with an excellent standard. They are some of the most superior books in series book literature. The attribution of the first six of these to the authorship of Roger Garis surprised me, since the other writing by him with which I am familiar has seemed to me to be only average. These books feature high quality in three areas: delineating and developing characters, crafting movingly beautiful descriptions of the grandeur of the West, and producing clever scenarios and conversations marked with subtle and wry humor.

In the first nine volumes, the high moral standard called “the code of the West” is established through many situations. The authors use an unusual but attractive style in writing dialogue—a combination of erudite vocabulary and the slang of the West. There is no discernible racism; in fact, it is deliberately rejected when the Chinese cook, Sing Lung, is overtly included with the ranch hands in family celebrations. In these first books the compellingly attractive Manley family is introduced, with its strong interconnectedness and mutual affection. The overall standard of excellence in the first volumes was likely set by the creator of the series, Edward Stratemeyer.

In volumes 10 and 11, *The X Bar X Boys Riding for Life* and *The X Bar X Boys in Smoky Valley*, the change in style is almost jarring to a reader familiar with the first nine episodes. The personalities of the characters are altered almost out of recognition. Although some of the elements in the plots are interesting and exciting, nearly every other aspect of these two stories is shallow and, in some cases, even disturbing. The names remain the same, but the boys and the ranch hands become narrow-minded overall and lawless in their attitude toward malefactors. Most characters, even the good guys, show a hostile and vindictive attitude. After the first nine volumes have established the Manleys as a strong and loving family, bound by the “code of the West,” a passage such as the following is upsetting:

“Let’s shoot him and get rid of him,” suggested Teddy, holding his pistol in line with Skinny’s heart and causing the puncher to wince at its nearness. “Nobody would ever know, Roy, but ourselves.”

(*Riding for Life*, page 179)

A moment later, when Skinny escapes by rolling down a hill, still tied up, the boys shoot at him, apparently to kill (page 182). In volume 11, once again the narrow, even vindictive, nature of the X Bar X hands is presented. Pop must be restrained more than once when he is eager to beat an injured and delirious stranger because, in his delirium, he describes Pop as a “red monkey.”

Descriptions of the settings are minimal and at best average. There is little or no erudition in the vocabulary. Although the plotting has some great moments, overall it is poor, with many unbelievable elements. The characters throughout are two-dimensional, and there is almost no humor of any kind. The boys’ horses, so central and affectionately considered in the first nine volumes, in these two books are referred to in the neuter. In almost every appearance of Belle Ada, the word “shriek” is used whenever she has something to say. There is a strong element of racism evident, with Mexican heritage considered something to be lied about since it is automatically suspect; Sing Lung shows humiliating deference to Caucasians—even the villains.

How can this abrupt change be explained? John M. Enright, in his article “Series Subjects” in *The Mystery and Adventure Series Review* (issue #21, Summer, 1989) suggests that Edward Stratemeyer, and subsequently his daughter Harriet, brought “scenes from the Buffalo Hunters series of the 1880s back to life at the X Bar X ranch.” Enright adds that the Syndicate owned the copyrights to some of the dime novels of the era.

Someone who is familiar with both the Buffalo Hunters (I’ve never encountered anyone who has heard of that series) and these middle volumes of the X Bar X series may be able to draw a definitive conclusion. However, since the personalities of the characters in volumes 10 and 11 are both developed and different from those established in volumes 1-9, it’s a good guess that these books were adapted from earlier sources, especially when the “code of the West” may have been

accepted with a much higher level of violence, and the law was frequently taken into one's own hands.

Thankfully, the problems in volumes 10 and 11 are overcome in volume 12, *The X Bar X Boys at Copperhead Gulch*. This book is built securely on the foundation of the series, but develops the characters and provide new information about them and the ranch life. This adds interest and depth without any sense of discontinuity. With some exceptions, the plotting is very good, generally better than the first nine volumes. Some conversations and situations verge on the melodramatic, but generally the high standard of the first volumes is admirably approached. There is no racism; although the term "half-breed" is utilized once, it is used as a description and not as a pejorative. There is no vindictiveness in the good guys, and much of the original bunk house banter has returned. As quoted above, descriptions of natural beauty are found occasionally in this book, although not so well written as in the first nine.

Volume 14 introduces a new character who remains with the series (singing ranch hand Eskil Alpheus Brown, known as "Ranny," a cowboy word for a "wanderer") and provides some new information about the X Bar X Ranch.

Internal evidence with volume 18, *The X Bar X Boys and the Sagebrush Mystery*, should lead us to conclude that another author has assumed the mantle of James Cody Ferris. This conclusion is not difficult to make (and the Stratemeyer files bear out this conclusion), since this book receives the dubious distinction of being the worst of the lot. A plot marked by wildly improbable and disjointed events, head-spinning changes of scene, movement of characters more rapid than the Whirlpool River in flood, almost zero character development, and embarrassing stereotypes of Indians prove that we have dropped far from the high standard set in the first books of the series. The first appearance of that bane of the genre, the reprehensible "coincidence," makes the discriminating reader look eagerly for a six-shooter to put the poor creature out of its misery. The best line in the book is uttered by the town lawyer, when he tells Roy and Teddy, "You'd better cut out the detective business and stick to bein' cowboys" (page 129).

Any hope that another ghostwriter has taken over the series when we move on to volume 19, *The X Bar X Boys in the Haunted Gully*, will, alas, be unfulfilled. Although the book starts out with some modest signs of improvement, the quality is not sustained. From time to time, this writer shows some skill in creating "western dialogue," and makes a commendable effort at producing a little bunk house banter which had been absent for several volumes. A completely unforeseen surprise ending had a lot of potential, but regrettably the story is just as disjointed and marred by "coincidence" as its predecessor. *Seeking the Lost Troopers*, the twentieth and penultimate volume in the series, shows similar signs of improvement, but at the end also falls short. One theme common to these three books is the finding of long-lost individuals, a device which is apparently a favorite of this particular writer.

Recent information discovered in the Stratemeyer files shows that this same writer penned the words also of the last published volume in the series. It is a delight to open the pages of *The X Bar X Boys Following the Stampede*, and find that the quality goes up significantly in every department. Two stories, of stolen jewels and fraudulently sold property, are blended together well. A Chinaman, a cousin of Sing Lung, appears, and is presented as a well-educated individual worthy of respect who speaks fluent and correct English. Sing Lung himself moves out of the bothersome stereotype in which he had appeared for many volumes. It is unfortunate that no information has yet been found to identify the outliner of this book or its unpublished successor.

THE ARTISTS

The artwork on the covers and frontispieces was done by three successive artists. For views of the covers of the books, please refer to the section in this web site called "The Books."

The much-admired Walter S. Rogers contributed his quality artwork through volume 10. This prolific artist contributed about 700 paintings and drawings for over 300 series books, nearly all of them published by the Stratemeyer Syndicate, beginning in 1911. It is curious that so little is known about him personally. His work ends suddenly in 1931, so it is a safe assumption that he died or retired in that year. His covers for the X Bar X series are in the white spine format, and, like all of his work, are noted for detail and subtle use of color and shading.

J. Clemens Gretter illustrated volumes 11-15. Gretter's covers feature bolder color and less detail than Rogers'. The spines on volumes 13-15 move out of the white spine format and show a little design and color. The endpapers throughout the series, once it was bound in red, are also by Gretter (the endpapers of the gray editions are blank). They show two cowboys roping steers, with one cowboy in the foreground having roped a shorthorn in such a manner that the unfortunate animal has been thrown on the top of its head.

Paul Laune stayed with the series from volume 16 to the end. His work presents us with wrap dust jackets with imaginative use of color, including orange, purple, and even lime green. His scenes and figures are the most realistic of the three artists. Glossy frontispieces ended with volume 17. However, Laune did not use watercolor wash in his frontispieces, as his predecessors did, but rather pen and ink line drawings.

THE PHANTOM TITLE, ETC.

I am indebted to James Keeline for most of the material in this section. He has spent a lot of time researching the files of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, and has e-mailed me numerous times with information he has unearthed, which relates to the X Bar X Boys series. Thanks to his references, I have also been able to acquire personally copies of some of most cogent material from the New York Public Library.

James wrote, "The Stratemeyer Syndicate was purchased by Simon & Schuster in 1984. At that point, the files and book collection of the Syndicate were boxed, inventoried, and stored in a Bristol, Pennsylvania warehouse. There the materials were stored for approximately a decade. Various inquiries were made to special collections which might be candidates to hold the Stratemeyer Syndicate Records Collection. At the Nancy Drew Conference in 1993, researchers asked Simon & Schuster editor, Ann Greenberg, when the stored materials would be available to researchers. A few months after this, announcements were made that the collection was being donated to the New York Public Library but that it would take several years for the material to be cataloged.

"What was not known immediately was that Simon & Schuster did not give any money with the collection to pay for the cataloging of it. Learning of this, James Duncan Lawrence Jr. (son of the Syndicate author of most of the Tom Swift Jr. volumes) arranged meetings with his employer, Chubb Insurance, where he and five Stratemeyer researchers (Jack Dizer, Deidre Johnson, Ilana Nash, Kathleen Chamberlain, and James D. Keeline) made a proposal that Chubb donate

\$75,000 to pay for the cataloging and preservation. This proposal was enacted due to the tireless work of Jim Lawrence Jr., and cataloging began.

“The collection was opened in the Fall of 1998. Like most special collections, the New York Public Library staff has made provisions to ensure that the materials are accessible to researchers yet are preserved for future generations. Some of the most fragile materials have been recorded on microfilm and others exist in photocopies in file boxes.”

Regarding the X Bar X Boys series, memos in the files reveal that Edward Stratemeyer sent a one-page note to Grosset & Dunlap on January 11, 1926, with the heading “Suggestion for new series.” Copyright restrictions prevent me from quoting from the memo directly, but it presented a rudimentary idea of developing a series of western stories for boys with a level of excitement with the characteristic Stratemeyer style: thrilling, but not too extreme. Ideas for stories were listed in descriptions of few words, such as storms, prairie fires, being lost in the wilderness, tracking down desperadoes on the lam, hunting for lost gold, property disputes, etc. The series had several working titles, such as “The Ranch Boys,” “The Young Cowboys,” and “The Trail Boys,” but the X Bar X Ranch was there from the first and the series quickly became known as “The X Bar X Boys.” The pen name James Cody Ferris was also there from the first, though without explanation of where Edward Stratemeyer came up with it.

Plot summaries two and three sentences long abound in subsequent memos, with intriguing titles. Most of them were never developed, while others eventually grew into the published volumes. Lists of titles exist in memos dated up to April 23, 1942, long after Edward Stratemeyer’s day. Many titles give hints of terrific stories that were never developed, such as *The X Bar X Boys on Elk Ridge*, *The X Bar X Boys Tracing the Fugitive’s Footprints*, *The X Bar X Boys and the Silver Smugglers*, *The X Bar X Boys Trapped in the Flooded Caves*, and *The X Bar X Boys Battling the Eagles*. There are probably more than fifty titles, fewer than half of which were used.

James noted, *“I have found for other series that Stratemeyer was interested both in plot and title in his proposals to the publishers. Harriet and Edna [his daughters and successors in the business after Edward’s death in 1930] seemed to focus first on a good title, and long lists of possible titles would be compiled and submitted to the publisher.”*

There are also a few pages of research notes, explaining western terms and duties on a cattle ranch. There is an extended quotation from a western novel by J. Frank Dobie, called *The Longhorns*, showing how typical, popular western fiction could be written. There are notes used to develop the various characters in the books, both the main characters as well as minor characters who appear in only one volume.

Finally, there is a two-page, undated memo with a cast of characters for the phantom title, *The X Bar X Boys With the Border Patrol*, and an eight-page summary of the plot. James’ most recent message included this startling news from his investigation of selected Stratemeyer files on microfilm: *“In reel 6 is a series of letters to McFarlane discussing the offer for him to write X Bar X Boys 22 and indicating the receipt of the manuscript!! It was written--just not published.”*

For further information, including a summary of this story, see the section of this web site called “The Books,” and click on Volume 22.

RIDING OFF INTO THE SUNSET

The boys finally met their demise in 1942. Probably they were a casualty of the second World War. The last book promised a forthcoming volume called *The X Bar X Boys With the Border Patrol*, but the book never appeared. (However, see the section of this web site called “The Phantom Title, etc.”) At the end of the series, the boys’ fate remains a mystery. One can, however, hazard a guess.

I don’t think the boys were done in by any bad guys, in spite of the many attempts made to end their careers prematurely. They were just too smart and too lucky for that, especially after sixteen years and twenty-one adventures in the saddle. I think that, being patriotic and noticing that a war was going on, they probably joined the army and fought bravely. Of course they wrote home regularly, came back heroes, and then went on ranching.

The economic boom after the war brought a lot of people out West, and the boys began to lay low. It wouldn’t do to have housing developments in the pristine valleys and meadows within shouting and shooting distance from the ranch, and Eagles warn’t made fer no suburbs. Nope, the boys went quiet so nobody would know where they were. They thanked their lucky stars that they had never been too precise about where their ranch was located. The boys finally overcame their shyness and Nell and Curly overcame their stand-offishness and the two couples got married, inherited the adjacent 8 X 8, began producing the fourth generation of ranching Manleys, and now run a ranch nearly twice the size of the X Bar X. But finding its precise location will never be possible. The loss is ours.

It has been six decades since young Roy and Teddy rode freely and exuberantly through the mountains and meadows in the environs of the X Bar X ranch. The world has changed drastically almost everywhere since then. Yet, after we have laid aside these books, which contain some of the finest writing in the series book world (along with a lot that is mediocre and some that is downright bad), we are left with a sense of peace and contentment. It is not hard to lean back and imagine the sound of boot heels on the wooden floor of the verandah, the smell of the sagebrush after an early morning summer cloudburst, and the sight of uncountable millions of stars in the Colorado night sky. As we come to the close of the twentieth century—a time of frenetic living, high technology, pollution, and endangered species—this is a vision which many people long for.

We’ll let Dad have the last word, for he always spoke true. Bardwell Manley said to himself once, “Reckon I’m pretty fortunate in having two sons like Teddy an’ Roy. Pretty good ole world, after all!” (*At the Round Up*, page 158)

#