

# The Two-Dollar Book

## Has Arrived



By SAVOIE LOTTINVILLE

A DOZEN YEARS AGO, E. DeGolyer, '11ba, thought he had an idea which might be of value to the book publishing world. Long a collector of Western Americana, Mr. DeGolyer believed of the books in this area what he had even earlier discovered was true of the great classics of science, that not one American in one hundred was aware of their existence, much less of their fascinating contents.

He had asked us at the Press what we thought of the idea of republishing some of these frontier classics. We had been burned a time or two on reprints, and our recollection of these fiascoes made us cautious—especially of reprints at straight book prices of three to five dollars a copy. Another eight years were to elapse before the first venture towards a series was made, not by the University of Oklahoma Press but by an Eastern publisher. The project, while not a failure, was also not a resounding success, and the first book in what was to have been a succession remained the last.

Meanwhile an estimated ten thousand priceless volumes, collected over a period of three decades and placed in a great vaulted room in the DeGolyer home in Dallas, were a daily reminder of one of the unfulfilled tasks of Western history. Aside from being one of America's best-known geologists, an international authority on oil reserves, and a well-rounded intellectual descendant of his former teacher, Vernon Louis Parrington, Mr. DeGolyer is a persistent individual. Two years ago in Dallas he wondered out loud whether his idea wasn't workable after all.

Today's fictional thrillers, he said, could hardly hold a candle to some of the violence that occurred on the frontier two generations ago. For sheer heroism, the cowboys of the trail-driving days and the mountain men of an even earlier period could top almost anything a modern writer might cook up in a novel or short story. Moreover, the accounts they left us had the very great value of immediacy, flavor, and authenticity, whereas the periodic recasting of these accounts by subsequent writers had infused several eras of American history

with heavy doses of folklore. Here, he suggested with characteristic penetration, was an opportunity to set things straight as well as to recapture some first-rate Americana.

In a nutshell, this is the way people are caused to change their minds. We began to see possibilities that hadn't existed before. We thought, too, that someone should make an effort to bridge the gap between the regular-priced book at one pole and the crowding mass of paper-backs at the other. Why not do a whole series in bound-book form to sell for two dollars a copy? Why not call it the *Western Frontier Library*?

Not all of these ideas were conjured out of thin air at that single sitting. Back in Norman, Glenn Bradley, the Sales Manager of the Press, felt pretty sure that he and his salesmen could sell enough copies, at least of a trial run of one such book, to take us off the hook financially. Willard Lockwood, the Art Editor of the Press, and Will Ransom, his associate, started thinking about format for the series, and in a few days came up with a handy little size and a shelf-back that issued a simultaneous challenge to the reader and to the collector. It was the *Everyman Library* but with a streamlined, twentieth-century look. Mary Stith, the Associate Editor of the Press, settled some important editorial points,

and Van Endicott, the Printing Division Superintendent, indicated a number of printing economies that were vital to the success of the first book in the series.

Between Mr. DeGolyer and me, we selected Thomas J. Dimsdale's *The Vigilantes of Montana*, first published in Montana in 1866. Actually, I didn't do much selecting: I think it was Mr. DeGolyer's choice all along. I remember him saying, "We could do A. S. Mercer's *The Banditti of the Plains* first, but with that much blood, everything coming after it would be anticlimax." He very promptly sent me an introduction to *The Vigilantes*, which appeared as the first volume in the new Western Frontier Library on September 28, 1953.

The next season, the spring of 1954, saw the publication of Mr. DeGolyer's favorite, *The Banditti*, with a masterful introduction by William H. Kittrell of Dallas. Before anybody could yell "Jack Robinson!" it had sold four thousand copies, and Glenn Bradley (who by this time had shifted into high gear with his promotion of the series) was pleading for greater speed in the production of more and bigger editions.

What had actually happened may be more than a footnote to American publishing history. From the moment the first book in the series appeared, reviewers, booksellers, librarians, and book-trade commentators set up a pleasant din, the gist of which was, "How can anybody publish a \$2-book these days, but isn't it grand?" These books are well printed, rather handsomely bound, and carry jackets which hold back not one whit from the events described within. Take the jacket of *The Vigilantes of Montana*, for example. The subtitle, splashed on a field of red ink, runs, "Being a correct and impartial narrative of the chase, trial, capture & execution of Henry Plummer's Notorious Road Agent Band." Or *The Banditti of the Plains*, which appeared subtitled (as in the first edition) as "The Cattlemen's Invasion of Wyoming in 1892 [The Crowning Infamy of the Ages]."



E. DeGOLYER  
... An Idea Came to Life

Some people have been so rash as to suggest that these books are the only real competition to the TV screen. But we've learned not to count gains until they are actually in. Let's put it this way. We think the Western Frontier Library is here to stay, and we hope to build it (with Mr. DeGolyer's excellent counsel and advice) for the long haul.

At this sitting, we are sold out of Pat Garrett's *The Authentic Life of Billy, the Kid*, for which J. C. Dykes has provided the introduction, two weeks ahead of publication. Joseph Henry Jackson of the *San Francisco Chronicle* is at work on an introduction to *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*, written by Oklahoma's own John Rollin Ridge during his California sojourn in the years following the Gold Rush. A. B. Guthrie, Jr., author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Big Sky*, will shortly receive the typescript of Lewis H. Garrard's *Wah-To-Yah and the Taos Trail*. And Ramon F. Adams is at work on his introduction to Charles Lee Martin's *A Sketch of Sam Bass, the Bandit*. These are Volumes 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the Western Frontier Library.

Perhaps this entire venture is directly traceable to a conviction which has prevailed at the University and among its alumni for a long time, that Western history is, after all, the stuff of which we ourselves are made, and as such is of the first order of importance to us. In this field the Department of History has made many scholarly contributions during more than a quarter of a century. Its present plans, as I understand them, cannot but enhance the splendid position the department now occupies, and it will offer still greater intellectual challenge to students and researchers during the coming decades. The importance of this program cannot be lost upon anyone who is aware of the neglect which Western history is suffering in many of our leading institutions today.

In the column "Trade Winds," September 11 issue of the *Saturday Review*, Cleveland Amory made the following enthusiastic comment on the Western Frontier Library:

"This idea, to bridge the gap between paper and hard with a handsome, permanent, inexpensive, hard classic, may not be new. Its success, however, is primarily due to the enthusiasm of Dallas bookman E. DeGolyer. . . . the idea, in its Western form, passed, lock, stock, and format, into the capable hands of Oklahoma's Savoie Lottinville. . . ."

"We'll go right along with several authorities who have called this Frontier Library 'one of the brightest ideas in pub-



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*The Quarterly very gladly offers this record, written by the Director of the University of Oklahoma Press, of a great publishing enterprise, encouraged and generously supported by the vision and foresight of a distinguished alumnus. It is by such undertakings that our own Press has achieved its outstanding position among university presses throughout the United States.*

lishing in a decade.' Indeed, we'll go one step further and shoot from the hip; it's the brightest. The books are readably-sized printed, are beautifully boardbound, are handsomely colored-jacketed, are uniformly (5" x 7½") library-sized, and, above all, are budget-priced at two dollars and no cents. In the low-priced field not only are they the best-looking, best-handling books we've put to eye since the Collector's Edition of Pocket Books, but they are also, unlike the now defunct Collector's Edition, the best chosen—each the No. One Classic in its field and each with an introduction by a No. One authority. . . .

"As for profits, the sales are astonishing,

not only in the regular Eastern stores but also in the irregular Western. Several Montana stores sold over 200 copies of 'The Vigilantes' and one Wyoming dealer alone sold 500 copies of 'The Banditti.' One ultra-satisfied 'Billy the Kid' customer stormed back to Liz McMurray's\* Dallas bookstore. 'I can't believe it,' he said. 'Can't I pay you another dollar for it?' Miss McMurray remembered the code of the Old East. 'You can,' she said, 'but you may not.'"

\**Elizabeth Ann, by the way, who has made quite a reputation for herself and Dallas with that bookstore, received her B.A. from the University in 1935 (Editor).*

## Books By O.U. Professors

**I**N FEBRUARY the University Press published *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity*, by Gilbert C. Fite, Professor of History. The book is a study of the long and hard efforts which Peek made to put the farmers of the United States on an equality with other economic groups in the country. This is the second of Professor Fite's books published by the Press, the first being *Mount Rushmore* (1952). Professor Fite will be on sabbatical leave of absence during the year 1954-55, having also been granted a fellowship by the Fund For The Advancement of Education for research in the field of economics.

*Keys to Successful Interviewing*, by Stewart Harral, Professor of Journalism and Director of Public Relations Studies, was also issued in February. It is a guidebook to the fundamental principles as well as the practical and tested methods of effective interviewing. This is the third of the very successful books by Professor Harral in the field of public relations which the Press has published: *Patterns of Publicity Copy* was issued in 1950, and *Tested Public Relations for Schools*, in 1952, second

printing of the last was made in 1953.

During the fall season the Press will publish thirteen books, three of them by members of the University faculty. John E. Leibenderfer, Associate Professor of Finance, is the author of *Planning For Financial Independence*. The book is a soundly informative guide for average Americans in search for financial security.

Dr. Max L. Moorhead, Associate Professor of History and Director of Planned Programs in Latin-American Studies, has edited *Commerce of the Prairies*, by Josiah Gregg, whose masterly portrayal of life in the West was first published 110 years ago. Through careful study of Gregg's diary and hundreds of his letters, Professor Moorhead has enriched this edition with invaluable notes.

Dr. Edwin C. McReynolds has written *Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State*, which, although intended primarily for the layman, is a comprehensive and authoritative account of the State that will be welcomed by historians, librarians, and teachers. Dr. McReynolds is an Associate Professor of History.