

Mr. Case Comes to Washington: A Retrospective on the Founding of the Potomac Corral

by

Mike Lawson

Introduction

I became the custodian of the Potomac Corral archives in 2000. In preparation for a presentation on the history of the Corral, I reviewed virtually every document in the approximately twelve linear feet of records that comprise this archive. Soon after I began taking notes on these materials, I realized that there was more information than could be adequately encapsulated in one program, and that there were enough interesting topics for several presentations. So I decided to limit my focus and concentrate on the founding of the Potomac Corral, particularly on the “Dynamic Dozen” who were its founders, and the Corral’s relationship to the earlier Westerners organization. My rationale was that while many of the current members have connections to the Corral of the 1970’s as a result of either being active during that decade or subsequently knowing members who were, there are few present members that, by virtue of their earlier involvement, know very much about the Corral of the 1950’s and 1960’s. To round out my presentation, I also decided to provide some historical perspective regarding two of the Corral’s seemingly perpetual issues; namely (1) whether it is appropriate to meet at the Cosmos Club, and (2) how can membership be expanded.

The Progenitor

The Potomac Corral of the Westerners began at some unknown point in time as a tantalizing idea in the mind of Leland Davidson Case. A native of Iowa, Case had grown up in the Black Hills of South Dakota as the son of a Methodist preacher. After graduating from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota and earning a master’s degree

at Northwestern University, he launched his career as a journalist. Eventually he became the editor of the *Rotarian*, the monthly magazine of Rotary International, which was based in Chicago. Case was the brother of the Senator Francis Case of South Dakota, for whom one of our busiest Potomac River bridges was subsequently named.

Ironically, it was during a visit to Sweden in 1937 that Leland Case first thought of starting an organization that would be devoted to the history and culture of the American West. While on vacation in Stockholm, after attending a Rotary convention in France, he visited Skansen, the open-air museum of Swedish national culture. While viewing the exhibits of arts, crafts, and domestic history, it occurred to him that Americans needed to do more to research and preserve their own culture. He thought that this was especially true of the region of which he was most familiar, the Northern Plains, an area that was then suffering from economic depression and drought.

Upon returning to the States, Case pursued the idea of forming an organization dedicated to American regional culture. In this endeavor, he received the encouragement of several individuals, including the author Hamlin Garland, who had written so compassionately of the hardships faced by pioneers of the Great Plains. Another supporter was fellow South Dakotan Clinton Anderson, who was then an insurance agent in Albuquerque. Anderson would later become the Secretary of Agriculture, a Senator from New Mexico, and a resident member of the Potomac Corral. As a result of the encouragement of his friends and financial support, particularly from Clinton Anderson, Leland Case incorporated an organization in 1939 to be known as “The Friends of the Middle Border,” after Hamlin Garland’s best-known work, *A Son of the Middle Border*. This organization was based at Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, South Dakota, which set aside land for a museum and art gallery.

The Friends group was the parent of what later became The Westerners. In addition to Case, Garland, and Anderson, its founders included Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor of the Mount Rushmore monument, educator John Dewey, and historian James

Truslow Adams. Five years after the founding of this organization, in 1944, the members of its Chicago chapter, with which Case was then affiliated, decided that they should broaden the scope of their historical interest to include all of the American West. At a meeting held on March 27, 1944 at the Cliff Dwellers Club overlooking Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago, the twenty-three men in attendance chose the name "The Westerners" for their new organization. This name may have been suggested by Stewart Edward White's novel of the same name. White was made an honorary life member of the Chicago Corral in 1946.

Leland Case was officially the co-founder of The Westerners along with Elmo Scott Watson, a Coloradan who had founded the Chicago chapter of the Friends and was then a journalism professor at Northwestern University. The charter members decided that they would call their local group the Chicago Corral, and that their officers should have titles appropriate to the Western focus of the organization. Thus the presiding officer was titled the Sheriff, etc. The group also decided that its monthly presentations would be published in a "Brand Book," and that an adaptation of the artist Charles Russell's famous bleached buffalo skull drawing, rendered by members M. Martin Johnson and Raymond DaBoll would serve as the organization's trademark. This emblem later became known as "Old Joe."

The Chicago Corral therefore became the parent body of the more than 120 chapters of The Westerners that were established in North America, Europe, and Asia. The Friends of the Middle Border continued as a regional culture association, in which Leland Case also remained active throughout the remainder of his life.

It was not long after its Chicago founding that other chapters of The Westerners were formed. As historian Ray Allen Billington, who joined the Chicago corral in 1945, described it: "Leland Case emerged as a modern-day Johnny Appleseed, scattering new corrals across the land." Jefferson C. Dykes, one of the founders of the Potomac Corral,

described Case in 1955 “as the best damn promoter of new corrals and posses the Westerners ever had.”

The Denver chapter, also organized in 1944, decided to use the name Posse instead of Corral and the New York Posse, organized by Case in 1952, immediately broke precedent by accepting women as regular members. After all, as a later chronicler described it, “no one could deny Mari Sandoz,” the famous Nebraska author who was a charter member of the New York Posse.

The Founding

The Westerners became international when a chapter was established in London in 1954. In Leland Case’s mind, however, no other city in the world had a greater potential for supporting a successful Corral than did Washington, D.C. He was well aware that the government agencies and academic institutions within the region had drawn distinguished experts in various fields of Western interest, as well as many former residents of the West that loved its history and culture.

In late 1954 Case accepted a three-month assignment to serve as Chief Clerk of the U.S. Senate Committee on the District of Columbia. Soon after arriving in Washington, he called upon some friends to gather for the purpose of organizing a corral in the Nation's capital. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes of the National Archives made arrangements for a luncheon meeting that was held December 16, 1954, in the Federal Trade Commission Building. In addition to Case and Holmes, the other ten men in attendance were B. W. Allred, Roy E. Appleman, Robert H. Bahmer, Jefferson C. Dykes, John C. Ewers, Paul H. Gantt, Wayne C. Grover, Herbert E. Kahler, Ronald F. Lee, and Frederic G. Renner.

Case described to those gathered what a typical Corral meeting was like and the kind of members The Westerners had managed to attract. Following a discussion, the men decided that they would launch an effort to organize a Corral and asked Case if he

would serve as the temporary sheriff. He declined, but suggested that “Ronnie” Lee of the National Archives serve in that capacity in leading the organizational effort. The group endorsed this suggestion and Dr. Lee accepted.

The available documentation does not record if the name Potomac Corral was adopted at this meeting or subsequently. Upon its founding, the Corral became the tenth organizational chapter of The Westerners. Over the following two months, various members of the original founding group discussed plans for generating a list of prospective members and speakers and finding a potential meeting place.

It happened that Oliver Holmes was a member of the Cosmos Club, so he arranged to sponsor meetings in the Club’s upstairs dining room. This prestigious men’s club had been founded in 1878 by the scientist and explorer John Wesley Powell and others to serve as a gathering place for Washington’s growing community of intellectuals and scientists. The District’s major scientific organizations subsequently chose the Cosmos as their meeting place and the Club in turn spawned many new organizations, including the National Geographic Society.

In 1952, just two years before the founding of the Potomac Corral, the Cosmos Club had moved its headquarters into the Townsend mansion on Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. This magnificent French-style residence, built in 1873, remains one of the architectural jewels of Washington’s Embassy Row.

For most of its history, the Potomac Corral has met at the Cosmos Club. The first of these meetings took place on the evening of February 28, 1955. The speaker for this initial Potomac Corral program was retired Army General Ulysses S. Grant, III, a grandson of President Grant, who spoke about his grandfather’s early career as an Army officer in the West. During the business part of the meeting, the group elected Ronnie Lee to serve as Sheriff for the remainder of 1955 and Wayne Grover as Deputy Sheriff. The charter members also resolved to make Leland Case the Honorary Sheriff of the Corral for life.

A Distinguished Corral

Many people have described the purpose and meaning of The Westerners in general and the Potomac Corral in particular, but it was most eloquently explained by Corral Sheriff William Gardner Bell in 1970 when he wrote that the purpose was:

to bring together a group of people with a common and relatively serious interest in the American West; ideally individuals with serious intentions in one or another aspect of the great region and its history; individuals, again ideally, who have, are, or will be engaged by occupation or hobby in activities related to the West and who are prepared to share their knowledge and interest with their fellow-Westerners.

In keeping with this purpose, the Potomac Corral became one of the Westerners most thriving chapters, with a large and illustrious membership, stimulating meetings, and an ambitious publications program. Its resident members included Senators and Congressmen, Federal agency heads, and some of the leading experts on various aspects of the history and culture of the American West. The latter included Robert M. Utley of the National Park Service and Dr. John Porter Bloom of the National Archives, who both played a pivotal role in launching the Western History Association in Santa Fe in 1961. Each later served as both president of that organization and as Sheriff of the Potomac Corral. The Corral's guest speakers were drawn from similar ranks.

From 1956 to 1967 the Corral published a magazine entitled *Corral Dust*. The periodical's first editor was the recently deceased Professor Frank Goodwyn of the University of Maryland. Current member William Gardner Bell also served as editor from 1963 to 1966. The Corral produced a book entitled *Great Western Indian Fights*, that was published in hardcover by Doubleday of New York in 1958. In 1966 the University of Nebraska Press issued a paperback edition of this work that is still in print. A new hardback edition was published by Fine Communications in 1997. The Corral also produced two other book manuscripts, one entitled "Great Western Rivers" and the

other "Great Western Peace Officers," but never succeeded in finding a publisher for these works.

By 1967 the Corral's revenue was no longer sufficient to underwrite the publication of the *Corral Dust* and it was decided to discontinue the periodical in favor of a Great Western Series of booklets on single subjects. The plan was to use the best chapters from the two unpublished book manuscripts and the extended textual version of Corral presentations. Seventeen volumes were published in this series between 1967 and the 1990's, starting with former resident member Senator Ralph Yarborough's essay on J. Frank Dobie and ending with founder John Ewers' memorial tribute to his wife Marge. The Corral's publication program then went into abeyance until the *Corral Dust* was resumed on an irregular basis in the late 1990's.

For at least the first decade of its existence, the Potomac Corral revolved around the nucleus of its founders. The first nine Corral sheriffs, for example, came from the ranks of its eleven resident founders. It is indeed edifying to briefly review the biographies of these founding members and trace the connections to the American West that sparked their involvement in and contributions to the Potomac Corral. All of the founders were in government service in 1954, including four with the National Archives, three with the National Park Service, and two with the Social Conservation Service. Many of these men were veterans of World War II and at least two had been military officers. All were college graduates and at least three had earned doctoral degrees. The vast majority had at least lived in the West and most were also natives of that region.

The Founders

Leland D. Case

A founder of both The Westerners and the Potomac Corral, Case continued as editor of *The Rotarian* and later served for ten years as the editorial director of *Together*,

a publication of the Methodist Church. The various Corrals and Posses of The Westerners were established, and continue to function, as autonomous organizations. In 1958, however, Philip A. Danielson, a member of the Chicago Corral, provided an endowment to establish a Westerners Foundation in Stockton, California to serve as a the clearing house for all of the Corrals and Posses. Leland Case became the director of this foundation and served simultaneously as the director of the Pacific Center for Western Historical Studies at the University of the Pacific in Stockton; a position also held later by longtime Potomac Corral member John Porter Bloom. The Westerners Foundation was renamed "Westerners International" in 1969 and relocated to Tucson, where Leland Case decided to live in semi-retirement. Westerners International published newsletter entitled the *Buckskin Bulletin*, and established annual prizes for publications on the West and awards for chapter activities and programs.

Leland Case died in Tucson in December 1986 at the age of 86, having served The Westerners for more than 40 years. He had in fact been the last surviving founder of the Westerners. Shortly thereafter, in 1987, the headquarters of Westerners International was moved to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center in Oklahoma City.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

The man that arranged for those first organizational meetings of the Potomac Corral was a Minnesotan who had earned a Ph.D. in history at Columbia University and joined the National Archives staff in 1936. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes was the Chief of the Division of Interior Department records at the Archives and later became executive director of National Historical Publications Commission. He also served as an adjunct professor at the American University in Washington. Dr. Holmes was one of three Potomac Corral founders to serve as president of the Society of American Archivists (1958-1959; the others being Robert Bahmer and Wayne Grover).

One of Oliver Holmes' special interests in the West was stagecoaches and their delivery of the mail. He served as Sheriff of the Corral in 1961 and published a booklet on the Arkansas River as volume 7 in the Corral's Great Western Series, which won a Westerners International award for the best Western book of 1969. Dr. Holmes died in November 1981.

Ronald Freeman Lee

The man who served as the Potomac Corral's first Sheriff was a historian and senior executive with the National Park Service. Ronald F. Lee, known to the Corral members as "Ronnie," was also a Minnesotan in addition to being an alumnus of the University of Minnesota. After earning a master's degree in history at the University of Chicago and working in the field of historic preservation and conservation of natural landscapes, Lee joined the National Park Service as its Chief Historian in 1938. His service in this position was interrupted during World War II by a four-year enlistment with the U.S. Army Air Force.

Ronnie Lee returned to the Park Service as Chief Historian in 1946 and was named a special assistant to the Director in 1951. In that same year he authored a book entitled *United States - Historical and Archeological Monuments*. He also served as a trustee for the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society. Lee moved to Philadelphia in 1960 to become the director of the Park Service's Northeastern Regional Office.

Wayne Clayton Grover

Wayne Grover was the Corral's first Deputy Sheriff. He was then the Archivist of the United States, the executive director of the National Archives, having been appointed in 1948 as the third individual to hold that position. A native of Utah, he was educated at the University of Utah, where he received a Ph.D. in political science and

public administration. Dr. Grover was the son-in-law of Democratic Senator Elbert Thomas of Utah.

Grover joined the National Archives staff in 1935. During World War II, he served as chief of the records management branch of the War Department's Adjutant General's Office and obtained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He was appointed assistant Archivist of the United States in 1947 and elected president of the Society of American Archivists in 1953. Fellow Potomac Corral founder Dr. Robert H. Bahmer succeeded Dr. Grover as Archivist of the United States in 1966.

Herbert E. Kahler

The Potomac Corral archive yields the least information about this founder. However, it is known that in common with founder Ronnie Lee, Herbert E. Kahler served as the Chief Historian of the National Park Service. He also served as the Corral's first Roundup Foreman and in 1956 as its second Sheriff. In 1959, Kahler presented a program to the Corral on Fort Bowie, Arizona. However, by 1966 he was no longer a resident member. It was Kahler who brought present Corral member Bradley H. Patterson, who then served on President Eisenhower's White House staff, to what was the third meeting of the Corral. Consequently Brad Patterson, who first presented a program to the Corral in 1956, now has the distinction of being the Potomac Corral's longest standing member.

Jefferson Chenoweth Dykes

Jeff Dykes of the Soil Conservation Service was a Texan and a former faculty member at Texas A. & M. University. Two years prior to the founding of the Potomac Corral he had authored *Billy the Kid: The Bibliography of a Legend* and since 1950 he had been the associate editor of "The Brand Book," the official periodical of the Chicago

Corral. He subsequently published many books, articles, bibliographies, and reviews on Western subjects.

Dykes served as Sheriff of the Potomac Corral in 1961. He also chaired the Corral's Publications Committee and was one of the editors of the *Great Western Indian Fights* monograph. He was likewise one of the trio of Corral founders (along with Bill Allred and Fred Renner) that comprised "The Old Bookaroos." Their column on Western books was not only published in *Corral Dust*, but also in *True West*, *Frontier Times*, and the Chicago Corral's *Brand Book*.

Jeff retired as Assistant Administrator of the Soil Conservation Service in 1965 to devote himself fully to collecting and selling Western books. He was elected President of Westerners International in 1980 and also became one of its "Living Legend" honorees. Jeff announced his retirement as a Western bookseller in the Fall 1985 edition of his *Western Americana* catalog. In honor of his 89th birthday, the Corral sponsored a special picnic in the summer of 1989. This was Dykes last get-together with the Corral; he died in December of that year.

Jeff's body was cremated and his ashes were scattered over the Flat Top Ranch in Texas. This ranch had provided the setting and title for a book he had written in 1957. In 1990 the Potomac Corral established a Jeff Dykes Memorial Award for those "who have made significant contributions to the understanding and promotion of Western Affairs."

Frederick G Renner

In common with Jeff Dykes, Fred Renner was a career public servant for the Soil Conservation Service. He was a native Montanan who was educated at the University of Montana. Renner was a leading authority on the life of cowboy artist Charles M. Russell, whom he knew personally, and he owned perhaps the largest private collection of Russell's art. It was Renner who was probably responsible for the fact that the Potomac

Corral adopted as its emblem Russell's original buffalo skull drawing rather than the "Old Joe" adaptation used by the Chicago Corral and other chapters.

Renner served as Sheriff of the Corral in 1957 and authored a short biography of Russell in 1968 that was published as volume 4 in the Corral's Great Western Series. He was also one of the Corral's "Old Bookaroos." He retired from the Soil Conservation Service in 1961 and later moved to Arizona.

John C. Ewers

An ethnohistorian with the Smithsonian Institution who had trained at Dartmouth University and Yale University, Ewers was a noted author and authority on Indian subjects, particularly the Blackfeet and Plains Indian art. "Jack," as he was known to Corral members, joined the Smithsonian staff in 1945. He had previously served as the first curator of the Plains Indian Museum in Browning, Montana.

Ewers became the Corral's first Tallyman or treasurer and served as Sheriff in 1958. He subsequently helped develop and administer the Smithsonian's new Museum of History and Technology (now the National Museum of American History). He served as the director of that museum during its first year (1964-65) and was later named the Smithsonian's senior ethnologist. Jack retired from the Smithsonian in 1979.

In 1991 Ewers was the recipient of the Corral's Jeff Dykes Memorial Award. His wife Margaret, a fellow longtime member, died in 1988 and he subsequently wrote a tribute to her that was published as the last volume in the Great Western Series. When Jack died in 1997, he was the last surviving founder of the Potomac Corral.

Roy A. Appleman

A historian with National Park Service, Roy Appleman was a leading authority on the Lewis and Clark expedition. A native of Ohio, he had received his education at Ohio State University, Columbia University, and the Yale Law School. Appleman had also

served as an Army combat historian during both World War II and the Korean War, earning the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He had just returned to civilian life again in 1954.

Appleman authored several books on military history, as well as a work on Abraham Lincoln. He served as Sheriff of the Corral in 1959 and contributed to both the *Corral Dust* and the Great Western Series. In 1958 he introduced another Lieutenant Colonel to the Corral, who would become one of its most active and long standing members and leaders. That man's name was William Gardner Bell. Roy Appleman was an active member of the Corral for more than twenty years before he retired to Arvada, Colorado in 1976.

Paul H. Gantt

At the time of the founding of the Potomac Corral, Paul Gantt was an attorney in the Solicitor's Office of the Department of the Interior. In 1952 he had moved from Denver where he had served as an attorney for the Bureau of Reclamation. In that same year, he co-authored a monograph entitled *The Case of Alfred Packer - The Man Eater* with Irvin M. Gottlieb.

Gantt was born in Austria and received a law degree from the University of Vienna in 1931. He immigrated to the United States in 1938 and subsequently received a second law degree from the College of William and Mary in Virginia. After serving with the Army infantry during World War II, Gantt became chief counsel for the War Crimes tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany. In 1958 he left the Interior Department to become a contract attorney with the Atomic Energy Commission and in 1964 he was named chairman of the Commission's Board of Contract Appeals. Gantt also served as president of the Federal Bar Association and director of the National Lawyers Club

Paul served as Tallyman in the early years of the Corral and was its Sheriff in 1962.

He retired from government service and entered private law practice in 1974. He moved to Towson, Maryland in 1976, but continued as a corresponding member of the Corral until his death in the late 1970's.

Berten Wendall Allred

Also known as "B.W." and as "Bill," Allred was a Utah native and a range planning specialist for the Soil Conservation Service. He was an expert on the history of sheep, grass, and cattle. He published textbooks on range conservation and was a frequent contributor to ranch magazines as well as periodicals on Western history and literature. In the 1930's he was also a pulp fiction writer.

Educated at Utah Agricultural College (now Utah State University), Allred had been a cowboy in Utah, a sheepherder in Wyoming, and a county agent in Colorado before joining the Soil Conservation Service as a range conservationist in 1935. He was transferred to Washington in 1953.

Because of his ranching and writing background, it was fitting that Allred served as the Corral's first Registrar of Marks and Brands, who was the officer responsible for soliciting, editing, and preparing suitable publications. While still working for the Agriculture Department in 1959, Allred started his own beef cattle business on a farm in Oldtown, Maryland. Bill served as Sheriff of the Corral in 1963, contributed to both the *Corral Dust* and Great Western Series, and was another one of the trio of "Old Bookaroos." After retiring from the Soil Conservation Service as its Head Range Conservationist in 1965, he accepted a two-year assignment with United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization in Italy, Saudi Arabia, and Argentina. He returned to continue to raise cattle on his farm, but later retired to Utah, where he died in 1976.

Robert H. Bahmer

A native of North Dakota, Robert H. Bahmer received his undergraduate education at the University of North Dakota. He then earned a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota, where he wrote a dissertation on the Farm Labor Party of North Dakota.

After serving on Capitol Hill as secretary to Congressman Frank Hook, Bahmer joined the staff of the National Archives in 1936. During World War II, he served six years as an archivist for the Navy and War departments. Dr. Bahmer returned to the National Archives in 1948, when he was appointed assistant Archivist of the United States. He succeeded fellow Potomac Corral founder Wayne Grover as Archivist of the United States in 1966 and served in that position until 1968 when he retired. In common with Grover and Potomac Corral founder Oliver Holmes, Bahmer also served a term as president of the Society of American Archivists (1961-1962).

In addition to its founding members, the first officers of Potomac Corral also included Usher L. Burdick as “His Honor, The Judge.” This was a position new and unique to any Corral or Posse and its establishment may have had something to do with the prestige that Burdick brought to the chapter by being a Congressman from North Dakota. His Honor, The Judge served as the parliamentarian and legal advisor of the Corral. His job was to give authoritarian opinions and to “influence Corral dignity.” Another Congressman, John Foley of Maryland, later held this position for a substantial time.

Six of the Potomac Corral’s eleven founders were still resident members of the Corral in 1966; Appleman, Dykes, Ewers, Gantt, Holmes, and Renner. By 1976, only three founders remained resident members: Jeff Dykes, Jack Ewers, and Oliver Holmes. By 1986, only Jeff and Jack were active, and by 1996 only Jack remained.

Searching the Cosmos

One of the aspects that made the Potomac Corral special was its meeting place.

As founder Roy Appleman wrote:

it would be difficult to imagine a finer or more agreeable place to meet than the walnut-paneled, dining room off the main lounge and drawing room on the second floor of the beautifully appointed Cosmos Club . . . The fact that John Wesley Powell, the first man to navigate the Colorado River canyons, founded the club gives it added meaning to all Corral members.

Despite this seemingly neat fit, many Corral members gradually became concerned about dining costs at the Club. By 1974 meal costs had increased to \$8.25. One of the topics of discussion at the first meeting of the 1974-75 season was whether or not the Corral should find another meeting place. Consequently, Corral officers began in earnest to search out other potential meeting places and contacted approximately thirty restaurants and hotel dining rooms.

In October 1975, long-time member Bill Bell advised the Corral that it should remain at the Cosmos Club “where history, tradition, associations, ambience, and location all combine to offset any modest saving that might be attained at another establishment.” After the Club imposed a \$50 surcharge on the monthly meeting, however, the officers decided to hold the October 1976 meeting at the Kenwood Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland, which charged only \$7.50 for dinner. This was followed by a November meeting at the Circle One restaurant at 23rd and L Streets, N.W., in Washington, where the dinner price was \$8.75. These meeting places must not have proved satisfactory, however, because the Corral met back at the Cosmos Club in December 1976.

Another issue that increasingly came to the forefront of Corral concerns was the restrictions the Cosmos Club placed on women. Due in large part to these restrictions, the activities of the Corral remained “male only” for more than twenty years, except for the May meeting that was held in the Powell Auditorium rather than the Club member’s dining room. This May meeting was dubbed “Squaw Night,” until the

distinguished anthropologist and resident member Verne F. Ray advised that that moniker was not politically correct. Consequently, the Corral starting billing the May meetings as “Ladies Night.”

In October 1977, the Corral voted to open membership “to all persons interested in the objectives of the Westerners regardless of creed, color, sex, or national origin.” The problem, however, was that the Cosmos Club did not totally lift its restrictions on women until 1988. By its 1982-83 season, the issues of dining costs and membership restrictions convinced the Corral to move its meeting place to The George Washington University Club, where it remained for two years. The cost of dinner ranged from \$10 to \$16 during this period. Unsatisfied with this arrangement, the Corral, in September 1984, again moved its locus to the Officer’s Club at Fort McNair in southwest Washington. The dinners there reached a high of \$20 in 1987.

Three factors combined to convince Corral officers that it was time to return to the Cosmos Club for the September 1995 meeting. These were the growing discontent with the quality of food and service at Fort McNair, the appeal of resuming the Corral’s historical continuity with the Cosmos Club, and the fact that the Club had lifted its restrictions on women. The Corral has remained there ever since, but seemingly the debate continues on the issue of whether or not the Cosmos Club is an appropriate and practical meeting place. Dining costs are again at the center of concern, as they have risen from \$22 to \$43 per meal since 1997.

Membership Fluctuations and Issues

Another continual issue of the Corral has been the size of its membership. In the beginning, Leland Case suggested that membership be limited and confined to those who had a real interest in the West. Membership was also limited by the physical limitations of the Cosmos Club. Consequently, rules were adopted that limited membership to 49 active members and 49 associate members, but placed no limit on the

number of corresponding members. The earliest membership roster in the Corral archives, undated but likely to be from 1957, contains the names of exactly 49 members.

By 1965 the restrictions on the number of regular members had been removed and there were about 100 regular resident members and 200 corresponding members, the latter of whom maintained association primarily in order to obtain Corral publications. Attendance at meetings varied between 30 and 60 members, except for Ladies' Night when the attendance was approximately 100. For the period 1963 through 1970 average meeting attendance was approximately 45.

There was a gradual decline in membership in the early 1970's as many of the elder statesmen who had been active in the Corral since the 1950's either died or departed to other areas to retire or accept new assignments. Sheriff Bill Bell then launched a membership drive in which the first goal was to have "every member bring a member."

The loss of membership made it impossible for the Corral to sustain its publications program and, consequently, by 1976 there were only 33 corresponding members. By 1977, dues-paying resident membership had dropped to 72. A decade later, in 1987, the number of resident members stood at 77 and there were only 8 corresponding members.

In 1988, under the direction of Sheriff Paul Scheips, the Corral conducted its most comprehensive review and analysis of the problem of "eroding membership." A questionnaire was circulated to all present and recent members and tabulated by a specially appointed Membership Committee. The most consistent response to the question of how to increase membership was to improve the quality of the programs. In other words, those surveyed had the view that "if you build it, they will come."

This, indeed, remains the Corral's greatest challenge and the key to its future. By 1992 the resident membership had jumped to 96, a 28 percent increase over what it had been in 1977, but the number of corresponding members had declined to 6. At present, the Corral's monthly announcements are sent to 103 addresses: a potential

audience of perhaps 175 people. The number of dues paying members is currently 49, but there are several individuals who attend meetings but have not paid dues. Recent attendance at meetings averages about 25 members and guests, or approximately 55 percent less than was the average from 1963 through 1970.

The problem of attracting the membership to meetings has been continual and the difficulty of getting members to make reservations on time has also been perpetual. This is what Bill Bell wrote in 1962 about the hassles of serving as the Chuck Wrangler of the Corral :

The membership has been somewhat lax in following through on notification to the Chuck Wrangler, with the result that the goings on up to meeting time are not unlike an Abbott and Costello routine. On the Monday before the Thursday meeting, with the notice out about a week, he considers himself fortunate if he has a dozen members signed up. So he calls the Club and with a flourish of dishonesty tells them to figure on 30 and set for 36. On Tuesday evening, having mushroomed up to 14 people, with one possible, he sits down at his "40-calls-a-month" phone and starts down the membership list. With careful consideration for his frontier sidekicks, he times this to the station breaks and commercials with which the TV westerns are interlarded so as not to cut in on their enjoyment. As the evening closes he is up to 21 -- Black Jack!!

A pair of volunteers come in on Wednesday, and a second evening calling session runs the count fairly close to the experience factor -- 30. Thursday morning he calls the Club and reports 28 so that the Corral treasury is covered from having to pay for members who say they're coming but fail to show.

In common with many, if not most, chapters of The Westerners, the Potomac Corral struggles continually to attract younger members. However, its experience over the years allows it to face this problem with the attitude that it does not matter if it cannot bring in members until they are in their 50's or even after their retirement. This is because, as has been proven time and again by people such as founders Leland Case, Oliver Holmes, Jeff Dykes, and Jack Ewers, and many others, including the recently deceased Frank Goodwyn and Lloyd Swift, members of the Potomac Corral tend to live and be active for a very long time.

This presentation was delivered to the Potomac Corral On March 28, 2001.

Mike Lawson, current Sheriff of the Corral, is a historical consultant on American Indian issues with Morgan, Angel & Associates, L.L.C., a public policy consulting firm in Washington, D.C. A native of Michigan, he earned bachelors and masters degrees at the University of Nebraska at Omaha after serving in the U.S. Air Force in Texas and Libya. After earning a Ph.D. in American history at The University of New Mexico, Mike served as a historian for the National Park Service, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs before becoming a private consultant in 1993. He is the author of *Dammed Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux*, published by the University of Oklahoma Press, which received the Phi Alpha Theta International Book Award. Mike has also been a recipient of the Ray Allen Billington Award of the Western History Association and the Governor's Award of the South Dakota State Historical Society. He serves on the Board of Editors of *South Dakota History* and is a visiting lecturer on Federal Indian policy at The George Washington University. Mike first joined the Potomac Corral in 1977.