

Unfiltered History Presented Each Month At Westerners

By Robert Stragnell, M.D.

For nearly 50 years Prescott has been home to an award winning organization dedicated to the preservation of the real history of the American West. The goal of the Prescott Corral of Westerners International is to replace the romanticized picture of Western history often presented as “fact” in motion pictures and other fiction with well-researched, historically accurate presentations and publications.

Founded in 1962 as the 18th corral of Westerners International, the Prescott Corral has a membership of over two hundred and consequently is one of the largest in the Westerners organization. The members of the Prescott Corral include both professional and amateur historians who do individual research, write articles, present programs, and listen to presentations by invited experts on varied aspects of the factual history of the American West.

Westerners International was founded in 1944 through the efforts of Chicagoan Leland Case, who at the time was the editor of *The Rotarian*, the monthly publication of Rotary International. Case was concerned that that the West was being depicted inaccurately by the writers, artists, cartoonists and motion picture producers of his day. In his view, the real story of the West was not being told or preserved. Seeking to rectify this discontinuity between fact and fiction, Case interested others of like mind and established the organization that became Westerners International. Soon, chapters of Westerners International, or as they are called “corrals,” sprang up from coast to coast. Within ten years the desire for reality in the story of Western history had crossed the Atlantic and corrals of the organization were established in several European cities. There are now over 100 Westerners International corrals in the United States and over twenty others in such countries as England, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Japan, Mexico and Canada, each one dedicated to the exploration of the factual history of Western North America.

Word of this movement reached Prescott in the early 1960s. Dr. Charles Franklin Parker, then the minister of the First Congregational Church (and later the founder of Prescott College) arranged for a professor from the University of Arizona to talk about Westerners International to a group of Prescott men who shared an interest in the true history of the West at the Hassayampa Hotel on November 10, 1961. As a result, in May 1962 the Prescott Corral of Westerners International was formed. The Corral's charter membership included such well-known residents of the area as

Budge Ruffner, Gail Gardner, Danny Freeman, Bruce Fee, Norman Fain, George Phippen, Bob Kieckhefer and Harold James. Of this initial group the only remaining active member is Bruce Fee who served as the corral's "Sheriff" in 1966.

In only five years after its founding the Prescott Corral was chosen as having the most outstanding activities serving to enhance the historic awareness of its community of any Westerners International group in the country. Since then the local corral has won this award on five more occasions. Moreover, local members and speakers have been recognized nationally for presenting the best paper on Western History on several occasions. For example, in 1999 Bill Bork, a 1925 graduate of Prescott High School and third generation Prescott resident, received this award for his presentation on "The Impact of Wild West Culture in Germany." Most recently, Bruce Fee won the 2004 award for his presentation "George Phippen, Prescott's Premier Western Artist."

During the past forty-plus years the Prescott Corral has presented over 500 programs on a myriad of subjects, such as the early founders of the area; Native Americans; immigrant-explorers; Hispanic control of Western North America; exploration and development of natural resources; and many others. Frequently, Corral members have had the opportunity to hear programs given by those who are descended from the earliest residents of the area or have been a part in the evolution of the community.

Each month our meeting of Corral members and guests includes a social hour, dinner and a program. In addition to the monthly programs, members have an opportunity to participate in field trips to sites of historic interest and for over fifteen years the Corral has held annual cook outs at a regional ranch or other site of historic interest.

The mission of the Prescott Corral is to promote interest in the history and culture of Yavapai County and Western North America. Consistent with that purpose, the Prescott Corral has given generous financial support to history-based projects and organizations within the community, including Prescott Public Library, Smoki Museum, Sharlot Hall Museum, Prescott Valley Historical Society, and Phippen Museum.