

CHASING FAME FROM THE SADDLE: THE ODYSSEY OF THE OVERLAND WESTERNERS

By Samantha Szesciorka

Introduction

In 1915, four men arrived on horseback at the towering gates of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. They were dressed in their cleanest cowboy duds and had even given their horses a good bath and brushing before they arrived. The men sat tall in their saddles as their horses walked through the crowded thoroughfare, a shaggy black dog trotting behind them. They had reason to promenade – they were taking the final steps of an unprecedented equestrian journey. The riders were on their last dollar, road weary, and homesick, but nonetheless optimistic.

The Panama-Pacific International Exposition was to be the grand homecoming of the Overland Westerners, as they called themselves. After three years on the trail, the men had ridden more than 20,000 miles to visit every state capitol in the U.S., and they were sure that fame and fortune now awaited them. However, when they reached their destination at the Expo grounds, they were devastated to discover that acclaim is not necessarily guaranteed for great success. Overshadowed by the myriad of wonders that the Expo offered, the Overland Westerners found they could not compete. The public simply wasn't interested in four men with nothing better to do than ride around on horses. Defeated and disillusioned, the men returned home penniless. The Overland Westerners were promptly forgotten.

The Overland Westerners were neither the first nor the last to undertake an equestrian expedition across the United States. During the 20th century, many long riders set out to find adventure in the saddle. Several of those riders became household names thanks to published travelogues and lecture tours. Some were invited to appear with U.S. Presidents in parades. A few were honored with statues or other memorials. The Overland Westerners received no such honors. Their 20,352 mile journey is considered to be the longest documented horseback ride in the 20th century. So why did they find fame fleeting?

The Overland Westerners failed to find success in the saddle because they overestimated the significance of their feat and they underestimated the period in which they rode. By the time they began their journey in 1912, automobile pioneers had already completed dozens of transcontinental journeys around the world and the country's most famous long riders were children. The Overland Westerners, who were easy to dismiss as just four saddle tramps, seemed to reflect an outworn era. Even their destination – the Panama Pacific International Exposition – which celebrated the progress of civilization only served to highlight their irrelevance. For the Overland Westerners, theirs was an archaic accomplishment.

The Overland Westerners

“At 1’oclock P.M. the party rode from the barn fully prepared to start on their overland trip through every state in the union...”¹ So began the personal journal of George Beck on May 1, 1912. Thirty-year-old Beck was the organizer and ringleader of the party that called themselves *The Overland Westerners*. It included George Beck’s brother Charles Beck,

¹ George Beck, Diary, May 1, 1912. Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum, Bainbridge, WA.

38-year-old Jay Ransome (George Beck's brother-in-law), and 20-year-old Raymond "Fat" Rayne. The foursome hailed from Bainbridge Island, Washington, where they eked out a living logging, working on the railroad, or in other laborer positions. George Beck, evidently unsatisfied with his prospects in Washington, decided success would not be found in the Puget Sound, but in the saddle.

Perhaps Beck was inspired by the exploits of other long distance riders who were making a name for themselves. The country had recently fallen in love with Bud and Temple Abernathy, who in 1909, at the ages of 9 and 5 respectively, rode from Oklahoma to New Mexico by themselves. In 1910 the brothers made headlines again when they rode from Oklahoma to New York City to meet President Theodore Roosevelt. The following year, the Abernathy boys (now ages 11 and 7) completed a transcontinental ride from New York to California in only 62 days, setting a new record for time. Americans were also talking about Nan Aspinwall, who in 1911 became the first woman to complete a solo horseback ride across North America, from San Francisco to New York City.

To top the Abernathy boys and Nan Aspinwall, George Beck dreamed up an even more ambitious long ride. In 1912, a newspaper article declared the Overland Westerners had set out from Shelton, Washington and would attempt to ride to every state capital in the 48 states. No greater motive was described other than they would "write stories of their travels and incidents of their trip, and gather up a great fund of information and views which may be of future value."² Their goal was San Francisco, just in time for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915. To support

² "On a Three Year Journey," *Mason County Journal*, May 3, 1912. [Shelton, WA]

themselves financially during the expedition, the men planned to sell custom souvenir postcards and calendars, as well as subscriptions to *The Westerner*.

The Westerner was a monthly magazine published in Seattle, Washington. It included fictional stories, special articles, current events, and pictures. George Beck made a deal with the magazine to sell three-year paid-in-advance subscriptions throughout the ride. The Overland Westerners were allowed to keep a portion of the money or barter subscriptions for services such as lodging or meals. In its May 1912 issue, the magazine published the details of their agreement: “In every instance and continually, they are to sell subscriptions to, and otherwise represent, the *Westerner Magazine*, and they are to represent this magazine exclusively.”³ The magazine promised to publish photographs and updates in future issues.

To give their journey an element of legitimacy, the Overland Westerners left their first state capital (Olympia, Washington) on May 1, 1912 carrying a letter of introduction from Governor Marion Hay. It announced:

*“These gentlemen, who are citizens of this state, are starting on a novel trip, a horseback excursion to visit every capital in the United States, ending up in San Francisco sometime during the Panama-Pacific Exposition. [...] Such courtesies as you may extend to these gentlemen while in your capital city will be duly appreciated.”*⁴

The riders presented the letter to Oregon Governor Oswald West upon their arrival in Salem ten days later. After posing for a photo with the governor in front of the capitol building, Governor

³ Edgar L. Hampton, ed., “A Page of Westerner Talk, Theme: The ‘Overland Westerners,’” *The Westerner* (May 1912), 30.

⁴ Marion Hay, Letter, May 1, 1912. Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.

West gave the riders a new letter of introduction to carry to the governor of Idaho, the next state on their route. They would repeat this process dutifully in every state they rode through.

Almost immediately after setting out however, the Overland Westerners found life on the trail more challenging than they expected. They began their ride with one pack horse to carry food and supplies. The pack horse, named Pinto, did not resign to his new job right away. On the fourth day of the trek, just outside Little Falls, Washington, Pinto got away from the men and trotted back about nine miles. They eventually retrieved the horse but “during the scuffle the rifle dropped out and broke some off the handle.”⁵ The very next day Pinto made his second escape attempt resulting in the first injury of the ride:

“...Started to get the pack animal to get him ready but as soon as he saw us go for him he took a hike up the road and we after him but he knew what we wanted him for so in consequence he was not so easy to catch. He ran down a road and I supposed I would never have gotten him had I not yelled to a couple of fellows coming up [...] to stop him which they did and they turned him over to me and of course being very angry on account of the chase I gave him a licking he did not like it and bolted and drug me about 900 feet through the mud and got away again so I had it all to do over again. But myself and another fellow caught him in a barn yard so I took him to camp where the boys were waiting for me. I got the worse of the deal having sprained my ankle a little.”⁶

George Beck’s ankle suffered no long term effects and the men continued on toward Oregon, but it would not be the last time they had to chase down a horse or two.

The Overland Westerners crossed the Washington-Oregon state line after eight days of travel, but those included rough and rocky roads, swarms of mosquitos, getting lost, electrical storms, lightning, torrential rain, nearly impassable snow drifts, and other indignities. On May

⁵ Beck, Diary, May 4, 1912.

⁶ *Ibid.*, May 5, 1912.

17, George Beck noted in his journal that, “Charles was disturbed once during the night by some kind of an animal biting at his head. He struck at it and it ran across our bunk.”⁷ Ever optimistic, George mused, “these are things we are sure to bump up against in our travels on this the world’s greatest horseback trip.”⁸

In Prairie City, Oregon the men picked up a new addition to the party. Nip, a black Gordon setter – Newfoundland mix, was “rather smart and likes the horses and us also and we him so that’s all.”⁹ Nip tagged along with the Overland Westerners for the rest of their journey and became a beloved member of the group. He was incorporated into their souvenir cards, calendars, and other advertisements. Nip also made notable appearances in George Beck’s journals with entries that describe Beck’s attempts to make boots to protect the dog’s feet and getting into fights with local dogs as they traveled.

The Overland Westerners averaged around 20 miles a day in good time. George Beck often noted that they traveled between three to seven miles per hour. At that pace they were usually able to get into a town early enough to have lunch and then spend the rest of the day trying to sell souvenirs and magazine subscriptions. The men would split up to canvas residential neighborhoods and the business district. Initially, they seemed to have consistent success selling or bartering magazine subscriptions, which helped them pay for feed and lodging. However, even early on in the trip Beck’s journals occasionally mentioned that they needed to sell a coat, blanket, or other piece of equipment to make extra money.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 17, 1912.

⁸ *Ibid.*, May 20, 1912.

⁹ *Ibid.*, June 6, 1912.

In most towns the riders found locals to be very interested in their journey. Often they were able to secure free food or lodging based on the novelty of their adventure alone. But, not everyone was smitten by the saddle tramp lifestyle. In Pine, Idaho the group tried to get free lodging at a boarding house, but the woman who ran it “gave us a bum slur so we gave her the cold shoulder.”¹⁰ Mostly however, they found towns to be welcoming. In Boise, Idaho Beck rode Pinto in the 101 Wild West Show. In Dillon, Montana they were invited to ride in the 4th of July parade. They seemed to have no trouble selling postcards and calendars and Beck frequently mentions ordering more because they sold out.

For all the fun times, the Overland Westerners spent an equal amount of the trip trying to get out of binds. In Lombard, Montana, some of the horses escaped camp during the night and tried to cross a train trestle. George recalled, “The animals fell through and the train was flagged and some of the railroad ties had to be removed before they could be released.”¹¹ Several of the horses were too badly injured to continue the ride and the Overland Westerners were forced to trade them for new ones. Injuries and lameness resulted in several more horse trades during the ride. The Overland Westerners’ bad luck didn’t end there.

The day the Overland Westerners were scheduled to meet with Governor Edwin Norris in Helena, Montana they returned to camp to find someone had stolen Fat’s saddle. He was forced to borrow one from the town’s livery stable to use for the photograph with the Governor. A new saddle and bridle cost the men \$54.00 and, because they did not have enough money, they were forced to put up their tent, camera, and a gun as credit to get it. As they rode out of town, a

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, June 21, 1912.

¹¹ “Men from Far West Rode into City Today.” *Mankato Daily News*, October 19, 1912.

torrential rain began to fall. After about three miles they realized Nip was not with them and rode back to retrieve him. That evening they found an old shed to dry off and camp in while the storm continued. Beck's journal entry for the day concluded "[Jay] was awakened several times by rats nibbling at his head."¹²

Before they left Montana the Overland Westerners again swapped out a few of their horses for fresh ones. By this time Pinto the pack horse had found himself a permanent position with the group and increasing publicity. Huron, North Dakota's newspaper *The Daily Huronite* declared "Pinto has been chosen as 'it'. Pinto is a range horse but of wonderful ambition, energy, and endurance, and now that he has covered two thousand miles of the trip, he is fresh as the day he started. Should he pull through he will be placed on exhibition at the fair in 1915."¹³ Pinto appeared in advertisements that heralded him as "holding the long distance records of the world."¹⁴ He even had his own postcards. One showed Pinto in profile standing in a landscape of sagebrush and rolling hills, with the caption "I am going to travel 20,000 miles - meet me at Frisco in 1915."¹⁵

From that point on, the Overland Westerners refined their mission to include Pinto. Their souvenir postcards all featured a map of the United States showing their zig-zag route, and some version of similar explanatory text. One reads "The object of the enterprise is to bring one or more of the original starting horses thru the entire journey within the given time and thereby accomplish the greatest traveling feat ever known to the history of horse flesh in consideration of

¹² Beck, Diary, July 22, 1912.

¹³ "Overland Westerners to Visit Fair City." *The Daily Huronite*, October 2, 1912.

¹⁴ Advertisement, Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.

¹⁵ Postcard, ca. 1914, Object #3298, Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.

the change of climate, feed and water, the condition of the barns, roads and hardships of a ride of this nature.”¹⁶ Later postcards explicitly name Pinto as their mascot horse.

The Overland Westerners celebrated the 1913 New Year in Kentucky resolving “to complete the trip to San Francisco or flop on the trail.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, their fortunes had little improved. In the South, the group found it increasingly more difficult to sell cards or subscriptions. As Beck pointed out “they take a great interest in our trip and gather around and ask questions but the poor devils have got no money.”¹⁸ The group frequently found themselves unable to pay for meals or lodging. In Morganfield, Kentucky they didn’t have enough money to get all of their horses out of the livery. George and Fat paid for their horses and went on ahead, but Jay and Charles were forced to stay behind and try to raise more money to get the rest.

The next day George and Fat struggled to find the money to pay their livery bill and George noted glumly “When we trying to raise the money a little orphan boy about 12 years old gave us his last nickel.”¹⁹ Later that week, George was forced to borrow money on his watch to pay a \$2.50 livery bill. A large part of their money trouble stemmed from their difficulty in selling subscriptions to *The Westerner*. In Alabama Beck grumbled, “The people here to do not read. They seem to be dense in the head. The whole country is sadly neglected. [...] The West is good enough for me.”²⁰ But beyond the low literacy rates of the region, Beck failed to realize the irrelevance of the product they were peddling.

¹⁶ Postcard, ca. 1912-1915, *Author’s collection*.

¹⁷ C. A. Osier, “20,000 Miles in the Saddle.” *Empire Magazine/Denver Post*, August 23, 1964.

¹⁸ Beck, *Diary*, January 2, 1913.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, January 29, 1913.

In the poor, rural communities of the South, residents simply weren't interested in subscribing to a magazine that billed itself as "edited and published for all the people of the Pacific Coast and for no other people in particular."²¹ *The Westerner* dealt its final blow to the group the next year when it folded, leaving the Overland Westerners with nothing to sell but themselves. That too proved to be a challenge. When the men rode through Maine in the fall of 1913, Beck noted that it was "a lovely country and fine people, mildly suspicious of four fellows who had nothin' better to do but ride horseback – but friendly nonetheless."²²

In Lowell, Massachusetts the group wrangled up enough money to pose for a formal studio portrait. In one, Fat and Jay stand behind George and Charles, who are seated. All four are clean-shaven with smirks on their faces, and are decked out in cowboy hats, tall boots, chaps, and large kerchiefs around their necks. Nip is seated on the floor in front of them.²³ The second photo from the session is a close-up. The smirks were gone, replaced by a steely-eyed stare into the camera lens. Nip appears in the middle of the group eyeing the camera suspiciously.²⁴ These were just two of many images the group used in promotional efforts. They sold custom postcards, calendars, and other trinkets. In most towns they managed to generate publicity in the local papers, but as George lamented "you don't eat on those."²⁵

In February 1914 an ad appeared in the *Wabash Daily Plain Dealer* announcing the Overland Westerners would appear at the Yarnelle Theater in Wabash, Indiana where "they will present their lecture of their entire trip illustrated with motion pictures and slides."²⁶ Admission

²¹ Elmer R. Scott, ed., *The Totem Club Boy's Handy Book*. (Seattle: The Westerner Company, 1912), 521.

²² "Overland Westerners," *National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum*. Web.

²³ Photograph, Object #3290, Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.

²⁴ Photograph, Object #3289, Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.

²⁵ C. A. Osier, "20,000 Miles in the Saddle," August 30, 1964.

²⁶ Advertisement, *Wabash Daily Plain Dealer*, Wabash, Indiana. February 13, 1914.

was 10 cents for adults and 5 cents for children. It is unknown how many people attended the presentation or how much of the revenue the men received. In Danielson, Connecticut George journaled: “I made a talk on the stage. The house was packed to the doors and they say I did well.”²⁷ But, years later he admitted “I made a few talks, but I’m no talker.”²⁸

Halfway through the ride, a story began to circulate about a mysterious prize to be awarded the riders upon the completion of their journey. The first mention came in September 1914 in the *Moberly Weekly Monitor*. The article stated that the “cattlemen and horsemen of Washington” had offered a “big purse” if the riders were able to finish their journey with Pinto, one of their horses.²⁹ One month later the *Omaha Daily Bee* announced “A prize will be awarded them if they reach the exposition with any of the horses they started with.”³⁰ In February 1915 when the group reached Arizona, an article finally put a figure to the award saying the men were “on a 20,000 mile endurance trip, for a purse of \$20,000. [...] Pinto must make the 20,000 miles or they lose the \$20,000.”³¹ Who were these “cattlemen and horsemen” behind the dollar per mile purse? One source says it was offered by the Northwestern Stockmen’s Association, but the same article also says Beck denied the story. True or not, the story appeared in the newspaper articles from Missouri to Arizona, until it disappeared.

The Overland Westerners were relieved as they made their way back into the Western states, not only because it signaled the final leg of their journey, but because they found they

²⁷ Osier, “20,000 Miles in the Saddle,” August 30, 1964.

²⁸ Osier, “20,000 Miles in the Saddle,” August 23, 1964.

²⁹ “The Overland Westerners Arrive in Moberly,” *Moberly Weekly Monitor*, September 1, 1914.

³⁰ “Cowboys on Long Trip to Reach the Exposition,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 2, 1914.

³¹ “Horse Travels 18,000 Miles,” *Graham Guardian*, February 19, 1915. [Safford, AZ]

could relate better with the people. In one of the only surviving diary entries from Jay Ransome, he observed:

*“These are horse people, cattle people, out-of-door people. They are on their own, and they know damn well we are on our own, and are not craving sympathy. We can’t buy a bed or meal in this part of the country. It’s all give and no take. They just want to talk horse and gear and pump us for yarns about our trip. We don’t have to tell them about our hardships on the trail; they know all about rough going in a raw new country like this.”*³²

George too appreciated the return to familiar country, noting:

*“In the extreme East, where the population learns of the West and cowboys through moving pictures, pulp mags and mail order catalogues we were a draw, but in the South, especially in the deep South, we were just four men on horseback passin’ through. It was tough down there and we missed many a meal. We were glad when we headed into the West again.”*³³

In Utah, the *Salt Lake Tribune* announced that the Overland Westerners had signed a contract with a promoter named John M. Cooke. The article explained that Cooke would have the “four cowboys, ‘Pinto,’ the world’s endurance horse, and ‘Nip,’ the dog that has had more than 2,000 fights in the past three years’ travel over the United States, in vaudeville next year. He will also put them into the Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco around June 1 and at the exposition at San Diego for the last three months of the year. There will be a book written by a prominent author founded on incidents and data made of their three years’ horseback ride.”³⁴

Cooke himself was optimistic of his ability to parlay the ride into fame and fortune writing, “I

³² “Overland Westerners.” *National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum*. Web.

³³ Osier, “20,000 Miles in the Saddle,” August 23, 1964.

³⁴ [No title], *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 2, 1915.

firmly believe there is going to be a whole lot in it as this is a wonderful feat as far as the stamina of man and horse goes and it looks to me as though it would be a big winner.”³⁵

The group made it to their final state capital, Sacramento, on May 24, 1915. After posing for a photograph with Governor Hiram Johnson, they rode their last 100 miles. The four weary men on horseback, along with Nip and Pinto, appeared at the gates of the Panama Pacific International Exposition on June 1, 1915 – just as they had set out to do three years earlier. Over 1,134 days, the four men had traveled 20,352 miles through all 48 states. At each state capitol building they were photographed with the governor or his aide. Between them they spent \$9,000 and went through 17 horses. They battled rough terrain, wild weather, injuries, accidents, and a myriad of hardships. But, they had persevered and the Overland Westerners were ready for the glory they felt they were certain to obtain. As Beck recalled, “When we hit San Francisco, we figured we had stabbed a big, fat hog. We had accomplished what we had set out to do. [...] We felt that shortly we would be declared famous, and would be in the money.”³⁶

Instead of riches the men found only bitter disappointment. The large enthusiastic crowds that they expected were at the Exposition, but not to see the Overland Westerners. George later wrote:

“When we rode up Market St., instead of loud hurrahs and hand clapping, it turned out we were just four men on tired footsore plugs, cluttering up the traffic. Fact of the matter, an Irish cop yelled, ‘get them hay burners off the street. [...] It was my fault. We couldn’t even get into the fair without paying our way. I had made no arrangements for a concession and now it was too late. The hootchie koochie dancers, the fat woman, the armless wonder, the two headed calves had beaten us to it. We had room rent and barn

³⁵ John Cooke, Letter, 1915, Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.

³⁶ C. A. Osier, “State Capitol Was on 1912 Trek of Horsemen From the Northwest,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 18, 1964.

*bills and nothing to pay 'em with.'*³⁷

After their humiliating dismissal by the cop and with nowhere else to go, the Overland Westerners disbanded. Charles, Jay, and Fat sold their horses and equipment for just enough money to take the train back home to Washington. George stayed behind in California, determined to try to generate interest in the ride from writers, vaudeville agents, or movie studios. After several weeks of rejections, he finally admitted defeat, and returned to Bainbridge Island by boat with Nip and Pinto. And with that, the Overland Westerners faded into obscurity.

Thinking Transcontinental

The beginning years of the twentieth century highlight a watershed moment for industrialized transportation in America. In many ways, the uniqueness of the Overland Westerners' horseback adventure was overshadowed by the emergence of the automobile, which was poised to overtake the railroad as the mode of choice for long distance travel. Horseless carriages arrived in America in 1895 as a novelty invention. However, from 1900 to 1915, rapid technological advancement and demonstrations of feasibility led to a burgeoning social reliance on cars and, ultimately, the rise of automobile culture. While the Overland Westerners struggled to promote themselves from the saddle, Americans began to embrace the automobile and view horse travel as passé.

Transcontinental trips by automobile revolutionized the idea of long distance travel in the United States, which until then, most people did by train. A physician living in San Francisco completed the first transcontinental automobile trip in the United States. Dr. Horatio Nelson

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Jackson and his mechanic companion set out on May 23, 1903 in Jackson's slightly-used 20-horsepower Winton two seater. Other attempts had previously been made to drive cross-country, most notably by early car manufacturers, but none had succeeded. In fact, Jackson recalled later that he only took up the idea when he overheard some men "discussing automobiling, during the course of which it was asserted to be a practical impossibility to cross the continent in an automobile..."³⁸

At the time Jackson set out, there were only 32,950 automobiles registered in the United States.³⁹ Perhaps it is no surprise then that during his expedition, several newspapers reported about the frenzy of excitement the automobile caused in the towns it passed through. When Jackson arrived in Lakeview, California the *Lake County Examiner* reported:

*"The way the streets of Lakeview were lined with people Tuesday afternoon, one would think a circus was coming to town, or a 4th of July procession was about to pass. While it was neither, the people's curiosity had been aroused from a report that an automobile was coming this way, and that if they wished to see it pass it was necessary to have a seat in the front row, otherwise it might go through at a rate of 90 miles an hour, and would be out of sight before they could run a block."*⁴⁰

In most of the towns that Jackson drove through schools closed early and people lined the streets to see the Winton go by.

Jackson and his companion arrived in New York City on July 26, 1903, the entire cross-country journey having taken 63 days, 12 hours, and 30 minutes. The *New York Times* declared the journey to be "a triumph truly remarkable when it is remembered that not more than

³⁸ Curt McConnell, *Coast to Coast by Automobile: The Pioneering Trips, 1899-1908*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 63.

³⁹ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Highway Statistics, Summary to 1955*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), 28.

⁴⁰ McConnell, *Coast to Coast by Automobile*, 70.

three years ago long distance trips in automobiles that were attempted proved utter failures and brought only ridicule upon those essayed them.”⁴¹ Jackson’s success helped usher in the age of auto exploration. In fact, before Jackson had even completed his trek, two other motor expeditions set out from California bound for the East Coast.

Even while automobiles were in their infancy and roads were still dirt, gravel, or mud, there were men who wanted to drive fast. On February 12, 1908, six automobiles from four countries set out on an unprecedented race around the world. A quarter of a million people lined Broadway as a gunshot signaled the start of the New York to Paris Race. What followed would be a grueling months-long ordeal through the United States, Alaska, Japan, China, Siberia, Russia, the German Republic, and France. The contestants included three cars from France, one from Germany, one from Italy, and one from the United States. The prize: a 1,400 pound trophy and bragging rights.

The race captivated Americans who, fueled by a sense of patriotic duty, turned out in droves to cheer on the American car as it passed through towns. In addition, the *New York Times*, one of the race sponsors, published daily front-page updates of the race. As one historian noted, “Everyone who ever forged a new route in a car – and in 1907, that included practically every living driver – would be going along in spirit on the New York-to-Paris Race.”⁴² Even Americans who never dreamed they would be behind a wheel were inspired. In spite of a series

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴² Julie Fenster, *Race of the Century: The Heroic True Story of the 1908 New York to Paris Auto Race* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), 21.

of challenges during the race, the American team drove to victory, arriving in Paris on July 30, 1908.

The American team members enjoyed a whirlwind tour of banquets, parties, parades, speaking tours, and other engagements. American newspapers heralded them – and the American automobile they had driven – with weeks of news stories. The Automobile Club of America declared the race “the most convincing demonstration of the ability of the modern automobile that could be afforded.”⁴³ The race was a thrilling victory for Americans and most certainly inspired a great number of people to set out on their own journeys by motor car. In fact, now that it had been proven that it could be done transcontinental motoring became an equal opportunity adventure.

Just months after the New York to Paris Race got underway, J. M. Murdock, his wife, their three young children, and two friends loaded into a Packard “Thirty” standard touring car and set out from Los Angeles with New York as their destination. In Nevada, Murdock was impressed with the number of automobiles around Tonopah and Goldfield and even described the “well-traveled automobile road” between the two mining camps.”⁴⁴ But, he lamented the fact that Nevada had the fewest established roads in the country despite being the fifth largest state at the time. Murdock’s party left Nevada hopeful for change noting that “the westerner has a keen appreciation of progress and would like to see automobiles running thick and fast through the country.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Gary Blackwood, *The Great Race: The Amazing Round-the-World Auto Race of 1908* (New York: Abrams Books, 2008), 121.

⁴⁴ J. M. Murdock, *A Family Tour from Ocean to Ocean* (Detroit, MI: Packard Motor Car Co., 1908), 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

The group completed their transcontinental journey to New York City in 32 days, 5 hours, and 25 minutes, giving them the very specific claim of “breaking the transcontinental record for a single car driven clear through by the same driver and with the same party.”⁴⁶ Packard Motor Car Company published a short travelogue of their journey, no doubt in an attempt to entice more Americans to buy one of their automobiles. The Murdock trip proved that transcontinental travel by auto could be a safe, and even enjoyable, family affair.

Over the course of their 3,693 mile expedition through 11 states, the Murdock’s touring car survived sand beds, wheel ruts, washouts, mud holes, rocks, and other treacherous road conditions. The party arrived in New York to a crowd of newspapermen and fans. Looking back on the adventure, which they had undertaken “on a mere caprice,” J. M. Murdock mused, “I wonder how long it will be before a real national pike extends from coast to coast and allows of easy touring, whereby other motorists may enjoy the beauty of our great western country without being forced to endure the hardships of following broken and disappearing trails.”⁴⁷ As it turned out, motorists wouldn’t have to wait long.

Historian T. R. Nicholson named three great ages of motoring travel: 1903-1914, or what he called “the most romantic and inspiring, if not necessarily always the most dangerous or difficult journeys,” the 1920s, in which the “classic, much-traveled long-distance routes were pioneered,” and post-World War II.⁴⁸ He suggested that during the first age, travel by automobile was purely for sport and adventure, less for utilitarian purposes. But, those early transcontinental journeys were a harbinger of things to come. Once the first transcontinental journey was

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁸ T. R. Nicholson, *The Wild Roads: The Story of Transcontinental Motoring* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969), xvii.

accomplished, there was no stopping the automobile. As Horatio Nelson Jackson prophetically remarked after a stop at a local blacksmith for auto repairs, "[they] never sensed that our strange vehicle was a symbol of doom for their profession."⁴⁹

The horse, carriage, and wagon industries began to worry early on. Even before Jackson set out on his cross-country drive, one magazine expressed its conviction "that ten years hence there will not be a horse left in the streets of London or New York except for the few kept purely for pleasure and pride in their beauty and strength for police and military use."⁵⁰ Horses didn't disappear completely, but from 1903–1912, the number of motor vehicles registered in the United States increased by 4,004%.⁵¹ The number of domestic equines began a sharp decline in 1915. Perhaps the only thing that prevented the automobile from replacing horses completely, at least initially, was the automobile industry's inability to manufacture high quantities of low-cost vehicles for Americans.

Of course with the advent of the assembly line, cheaper vehicles did come and more of them, making automobiles accessible to even more Americans. By the time the Overland Westerners began their journey on horseback, automobiles could be found in the city and the country. Even Washington, the Overland Westerners home state, boasted 7,310 registered motor vehicles by 1910.⁵² Indeed, it would seem the die was cast for vehicular manifest destiny. Automobile pioneers were quickly conquering the world. By 1914 (when the Overland

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁰ James Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 76.

Westerners were just over halfway through their ride) the last of the inhabited continents (South America) was crossed by automobile.

The journey of the Overland Westerners could only pale in comparison to these ambitious automobile expeditions. In an era that celebrated individual records and accomplishments, adventurers were finding fame by conquering the next frontier, or at least being “the first” – first people, first woman, first solo, etc. How could four men on horseback compete with the exciting new records motorists were claiming every day? In fact, one wonders why they chose to ride horses at all.

Further proof of their irrelevance came just months after Beck and company returned home. On August 25, 1915, silent film actress Anita King drove through the gates of the Panama Pacific International Exposition in her KisselKar, becoming the first woman to complete a solo transcontinental drive across the United States. Unlike the Overland Westerners, King arrived to much fanfare and acclaim. At the Expo grounds, “She was accorded a reception in the Tower of Jewels and another in the Kissel-Kar exhibit in the Palace of Transportation.”⁵³ She went on to parlay her achievement into a series of promotional opportunities, including the lead role in a 1916 silent film about a transcontinental automobile race.

While automobiles went from a novelty to a necessity, Americans began clambering for adequate roads to drive them on. Not everyone wanted to have an automobile adventure, most people just wanted to be able to get somewhere safely. Infrastructure in the United States had to change to support the popular new mode of transportation. Dirt roads in high-traffic areas were

⁵³ Curt McConnell, *A Reliable Car and a Woman Who Knows It: The First Coast-to-Coast Auto Trips by Women, 1899-1916* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2000), 102.

systematically covered with tar-bound macadam and later blacktop (asphalt). In August 1911, the Congressional legislature introduced a bill to create a commission tasked with creating a national interstate system, made up of seven national highways.⁵⁴

The Lincoln Highway, which would link the coasts from New York to San Francisco, was officially dedicated in October 1913 with a goal for it to be completed in time for the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915. The association behind the highway quickly realized that the project would require more funding than they had initially imagined. They reorganized to concentrate on marking the route while leaving the funding to the communities it would pass through. The Lincoln Highway Association began to mark the route in 1914, the same year that the production of motor vehicles exceeded the production of wagons and carriages in the United States.⁵⁵

Despite their goal, the road remained rough when the Expo opened in 1915; only a few experimental miles had been paved with concrete. While most Expo attendees arrived in San Francisco by train, thousands braved the new Lincoln Highway. Among them, a trio of travelers in a new Packard 1-35 touring car. The group, which consisted of the new secretary of the Lincoln Highway Association and a top mechanic for Packard made a “triumphant entrance to San Francisco and the exposition. Covered with mud and road grime, filled with dirty camping equipment, [the Packard] was promptly placed on display in the Palace of Transportation, where it soon drew a crowd.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ J. E. Pennybacker, Jr., ed., American Highway Association, *The Official Good Roads Year Book of the United States* (Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, 1913), 15.

⁵⁵ Drake Hokanson, *The Lincoln Highway: Main Street Across America* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1988), 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

That same year, the nation's first motor park – the Overland Motor Park – opened in Denver, Colorado. More motor parks followed as the automobile solidified itself as a reliable means of transportation for personal journeys. A new industry of businesses emerged dedicated to motorists. Livery stables turned into automobile garages and gas stations opened around the country. More and more people took to the road for leisure and “the automobile was said to have revolutionized the average American's vacation.”⁵⁷ By the time the Overland Westerners were completing their ride, the vast majority of Americans believed that adventure, travel, and the Western experience were to be had by automobile, not horse.

Automobiles helped to shape the nation's perception of the West. Whereas a growing number of tourists began to feel limited by set rail routes and confined to the towns that existed at rail stops, the automobile allowed its passengers the freedom to experience the West in a personal way and gain a sort of intimacy with the land, even if it was filtered through preconceived notions of the place. In 1907, writer Henry James remarked that traveling by automobile allowed him to throw out “the lasso of observation.”⁵⁸ Another motorist romanticized “The automobile, at last, brings us back to something of the old intimacies... you stop, to talk, to look at a cactus, an eagle or a sunset, to see the sights.”⁵⁹ Automobiles allowed travelers to experience what they perceived as the past, in a modern way.

The American West enjoyed an explosion of automobile tourism in the 1910s for several reasons. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 deterred many would-be-travelers from visiting Europe. The American West became an attractive alternative. The Panama-Pacific International

⁵⁷ Robert Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1986), 143.

⁵⁸ Henry James, *The American Scene* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1907), 48.

⁵⁹ Lewis Gannett, *Sweet Land* (New York: Doubleday, 1934), 5.

Exposition in 1915 was the biggest expo of the year, bringing more than 18 million visitors to California. The creation of the National Parks Service and the “See America First” campaign in 1916 emphasized outdoor family recreation. With a renewed interest in nature and wilderness, the American public responded in droves. As one researcher concluded, “During those years, national per capita travel increased sixfold, most of the gain being due to the wider use of the automobile.”⁶⁰

Into the Pacific

In time, George Beck seemed to understand how the Overland Westerners had misjudged the timing of their ride. Years afterward he explained, “The pot of gold we had been pursuing had moved out, way out into the Pacific Ocean by the time we reached San Francisco.”⁶¹ The four riders were no match for the pomp and spectacle of the Panama Pacific International Exposition. And in many ways, they represented the very thing the Expo sought to distance itself from. There was no place for the Overland Westerners at an event that billed itself as representing “a decade in the material progress of civilization.”⁶²

The Exposition was created ostensibly to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, but more so it allowed San Francisco to celebrate its swift recovery after the devastating 1906 earthquake. As one researcher noted, “San Francisco continued to rebuild, as newspaper dispatches reported progress in the building of the great Canal in Panama. Their destinies were linked.”⁶³ In addition, as the West Coast port of call for ships passing through the newly

⁶⁰ Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America*, 147.

⁶¹ Osier, “20,000 Miles in the Saddle,” August 30, 1964.

⁶² “Official Guide of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition,” (San Francisco: The Wahlgreen Co., Sept., 1915), 18.

⁶³ Donna Ewald, *San Francisco Invites the World: The Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991), 6.

completed Canal, San Francisco was the apropos choice to host the Expo. After two years of non-stop construction, the Expo gates opened to the public on February 20, 1915.

More than 18 million people attended the Panama Pacific International Exposition during its 288 days of operation. Admission cost 50¢ for adults and 25¢ for children under 12. Visitors were granted access to a dazzling display of education, art, science, and industry. Eleven grand exhibit palaces contained more than 70,000 individual exhibits. Murals, sculptures, botanical gardens, livestock events, musical performances, auto races, flight demonstrations, carnivals, and other diversions lined the streets of the 635 acre site. In addition, the Expo boasted barber shops, a hospital, several firehouses, motion picture theaters, photo studios, a post office, a polo field, restaurants, telegraphs, and telephone stations.

The Expo hosted many “firsts” – the first indoor airplane flight, the first transcontinental telephone call, the first periscope in the U.S., the first team pyrotechnics, the first indirect lighting, etc. In addition, “it was the first great American world’s fair to not exhibit horse-drawn vehicles and the first to have automobile parking lots.”⁶⁴ Automobiles in particular were a popular sight at the Expo. Visitors could even watch Henry Ford’s assembly line turn out one car every ten minutes for three hours each afternoon (except Sundays). Daily air shows thrilled audiences, most of whom had never seen an airplane before. Throughout the Expo, pilots set a number of new flight records, including highest elevation, fastest speed, and longest flight.

Every aspect of the Expo was designed to celebrate the spirit of progress and civilization. The grounds featured landmarks such as the *Avenue of Progress*, the *Court of Abundance*, and

⁶⁴ William Lipsky, *San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exposition* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 103.

the *Fountain of Energy*. The architecture was grandiose; the exhibitions even more so. Organizers sought to curate the world's innovations in one place making the Expo, "a microcosm so nearly complete that if all the world were destroyed except the 635 acres of land within the Exposition gates, the material basis of the life of today could have been reproduced from the exemplifications of the arts, inventions and industries there exhibited."⁶⁵ More than 20 nations and 28 American states and territories were represented at the Expo with exhibitions that covered so much ground it would have been virtually impossible for a visitor to see everything.

Each palace was filled with exhibitions that highlighted the advancements, the breakthroughs, the innovations, and "the achievements of all civilized nations in all lines of human endeavor."⁶⁶ In the Palace of Manufacturers, visitors could browse displays from hundreds of industries, from retail to plumbing to machinery. The Palace of Varied Industries focused on a motley assortment of "stationery, desk accessories, artists' materials, silversmiths' and goldsmiths' ware, jewelry, clock and watchmaking, objects of ornamental design, glass, fine leather articles, fancy articles and basket work, ceramics, equipment and processes for finishing textiles, threads and cotton fabrics, silk and silk fabrics, laces, embroidery, wearing apparel, furs and skins, mortuary monuments and undertakers' furnishings and various industries connected with clothing."⁶⁷

The Palace of Machinery housed engines and electrical appliances. The Palace of Mines and Metallurgy featured natural mineral resources of the world and their use. The Palace of Transportation displayed locomotives, steam and electric power, ships and boats, airplanes, and

⁶⁵ Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 1 (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1921), vx-xvi

⁶⁶ "Official Guide of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition," 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

automobiles. In the Palace of Food Products visitors were treated to a dizzying array of exhibitions that covered food from the farm to the table, including cereal, bakers, coffee roasters, and even a chewing gum manufacturing plant. The Palace of Fine Arts displayed paintings, sculptures, and murals from contemporary artists along with a special section of American art dating from the Colonial period “in order that the popular error of supposing that the American artist of today is without ancestry or tradition may be refuted.”⁶⁸ The Palace of Education and Social Economy highlighted the latest trends in teaching, including the use of film and graphophone in schools.

The Palace of Liberal Arts covered nearly six acres of floor space with exhibitions focused on all aspects of science, history, and philosophy. Displays showed off the newest book making techniques, maps, photographic processes, surveying equipment, astronomical instruments, optical instruments, adding machines, medical instruments, x-ray machines, drugs, artificial limbs, musical instruments, along with wireless telephones, radios, fire alarms, and more. Within the Palace of Horticulture, visitors could browse displays of real exotic fruits, flowers, and trees along with exhibits about the advancements in plant hybridization. The livestock area featured the best breeds of horses, cattle, swine, and poultry, along with a dogs from around the world exhibit.

Even the amusement concessions seemed to reflect the love of the modern that characterized the rest of the Expo. The Joy Zone was seven blocks of more than 60 attractions, thrill rides, and carnival-type games, designed to give visitors a respite from the seriousness and earnestness of the main Exposition halls. An aerscope (a precursor to the ferris wheel, which

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

consisted of an enclosed observation booth at the end of a 200-foot steel arm) gave visitors an aerial view of the Expo and the city. A 5-acre miniature reproduction of the Panama Canal allowed visitors to get an up close look at the world's latest engineering marvel. Visitors could also voyage underwater in a facsimile of a submarine. The "Infant Incubator" featured live "tiny tots that had tried to begin life too soon and had to be kept in warm glass chambers awhile so they could get a better start excited the sympathy of thousands."⁶⁹ Live storks roamed through the incubators for added ambiance.

For all its progressive overtones, there was also an element of nostalgia built into the Panama Pacific International Exposition. Much of the architecture evoked the beauty and grandeur of the past while the artwork reflected a revival of western themes, most notably the triumphalist spirit. One of the most iconic artworks from the Exposition was James Earle Fraser's "End of the Trail" sculpture. The monumental plaster figure of a weary Native American man slumped over an equally weary-looking horse towered over visitors at the entrance to the Court of Palms. The official program for the Exposition notified visitors that, "The work may be interpreted merely as a picture of physical exhaustion, or as symbolizing the tragic story of the extinction of the redman."⁷⁰ The sculpture was one of the most replicated souvenir images at the Expo and one of the few sculptures to survive after it ended.

Other sculptures included "The Fountain of Energy" (described as symbolizing "the power of America rising from the sea"), "The Mother of Tomorrow" (depicting a woman leading Native Americans, a prairie schooner, and an African American boy, among others.), "The

⁶⁹ Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 5 (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1921), 361.

⁷⁰ "Official Guide of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition," 75.

American Pioneer” (a man on horseback, “erect, dignified, reflecting on the things that have been...”), and “The Priestess of Culture” (a winged woman who “holds in either arm an overflowing cornucopia, the symbol of what she is able to give you.”).⁷¹ Not surprisingly, the artists who created the Expo’s sculptures were all American, a calculated move by Expo organizers which allowed them to further highlight America’s position on the world’s stage. Even the Exposition’s official guide book proclaimed that the sculptures symbolized “the achievement and tells the story of the great triumph of the United States...”⁷² In that sense the nostalgia present throughout the Exposition grounds was not so much a lamentation for the loss of the past, but an acknowledgement of the inevitability of it.

Ironically, not all vestiges of the past were popular at the Exposition. The 101 Ranch was a traveling Wild West troupe from Bliss, Oklahoma that had a large performance space in the Zone. Their twice-daily show featured a variety of iconic Western themes, including an Indian village, horse thieves, a stagecoach hold-up by Mexican bandits, Indian War Dances, expert rifle shooting from horseback, and other equestrian feats. Their show -“Across the Plains in the Early Days”- promised to be “a faithful reproduction of the early pioneer days and the hardships encountered.”⁷³ Unfortunately, visitors caught up in the forward-thinking spectacle of the Expo, were not interested. Attendance to the free show was so low and the cost of maintaining it was so high that Expo organizers closed the 101 Ranch show after only a few months and “the site, with

⁷¹ Juliet James, *Sculpture of the Exposition Palaces and Courts: Descriptive Notes on the Art of the Statuary at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco* (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker Company, 1915), 5; 30; 54.

⁷² “Official Guide of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition,” 21.

⁷³ Lipsky, *San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exposition*, 94.

the seating stands and the big corral, remained empty until the close of the Exposition, except for barbecues or some similar occasional use.”⁷⁴

Likewise, the ‘49 *Camp*, located on the Zone, also failed to last for the duration of the Exposition. The attraction promised to show life in the early days, but was perhaps too faithful in its depiction of mining camp life. Exposition organizers shut the camp down several times after visitors complained about drinking, gambling, and prostitution that occurred on-site. The camp “reopened several times under promise to be good, but had evidently too strong a tendency toward histrionic truth.”⁷⁵ Historical accuracy mattered little to protectors of public morality. The camp was permanently closed two months before the Expo ended.

Conclusion

One of the iterations of souvenir postcards sold by the Overland Westerners predicted, “The story of the great ride will in after years appear in book form and in motion pictures. The Overland Westerners believe they will be appreciated by those that love horses and dogs and an enterprise that is full of adventure.”⁷⁶ While the men did manage to generate some interest throughout their ride, they failed to sustain it. In order to do that, they needed to tap into the pioneer romanticism that was beginning to capture the American imagination. Unfortunately for them, that romanticism had less to do with preserving pioneer traditions and more to do with interpreting the conquest of the West. It was the automobile that would allow modern Americans to experience and eulogize the frontier, not the horse.

⁷⁴ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 5, 363-364.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁷⁶ Postcard, ca. 1912-1915, *Author’s collection*.

Transcontinental automobile motorists were reimagining the West years before the Overland Westerners got on the trail. In 1910, Hugo Alois Taussig set out on his own cross-country drive from San Francisco to New York. His 4,088 mile trip took 42 days to complete. In the travelogue he published afterward, appropriately titled *Retracing the Pioneers*, Taussig admitted, "The truth is, that crossing the American Continent affords one but little variety of incident. As for the people we met, I can truthfully say that we met no Indians on our way across the Continent, and that the country harbored no such people as our interesting California '49er, the ubiquity of the railroad having made the entire people as one, and the numberless hotels mitigating against meeting with the old time hospitality of the farmer."⁷⁷ Indeed, with the exception of a stalled motor and a few tire replacements, Taussig's journey was relatively uneventful.

Taussig's lackluster Western experience would not have surprised historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Nearly 20 years earlier, Turner premiered his *Frontier Thesis* at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. In his now-famous speech, Turner argued that a dynamic frontier -the continuous pioneer process- had forged a uniquely American identity. He explained, "This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character."⁷⁸ But, at the turn of the century, continental expansion seemed complete. Turner declared that the American frontier was now closed.

⁷⁷ Hugo Alois Taussig, "Retracing the Pioneers: From West to East in an Automobile," (San Francisco: The Philopolis Press, 1910), "To My Friends."

⁷⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893.

Turner worried about the impact of a closed frontier on American development. He argued that as settling supplanted mobility, it would lead to a dulling down of the American character or at least a homogenizing. Perhaps that explains Hugo Taussig's disappointment with his attempt at a uniquely pioneer experience. Automobiles only allowed Americans to symbolically reenact the discovery and conquest of the nation - to trace a frontier that had moved out into the Pacific. The building of the Panama Canal renewed America's sense of manifest destiny. Its pioneers set out not to craft American identity by looking inward, but conquering outward. The frontier was now global and America had finally come of age.

In the end, the Overland Westerners really were just tired men on tired horses. Their adventure, while impressive, failed to stand out with Americans who were in love with modernity and the Progressive Era ideology sweeping the nation. The Overland Westerners were unable to attract anything more than cursory interest in the towns they rode through, and they attracted even less at the Panama Pacific International Exposition. It seemed the world favored a new kind of adventurer and a new kind of American. Instead of finding fame from the saddle, George Beck discovered only the fickle nature of the American Dream.

Today, the odyssey of the Overland Westerners is largely unknown outside of Bainbridge Island. A small museum there houses the most complete collection of materials related to their adventure, but the remarkable journey has mostly been forgotten by history. However, the lure of the saddle and the trail continues to attract ambitious equestrians. Each year long riders around the world undertake transcontinental journeys and enjoy momentary fame.

Postscript

Five years after the Overland Westerners completed their ride, an article appeared in the Mason County Journal that announced George Beck was on his way from Port Gamble, Washington to New York City “to secure a publisher for the story of what is considered the greatest ride in history.”⁷⁹ There’s no record of what happened once Beck reached New York City, but he never succeeded in getting a book published about the journey. He eventually returned to Washington where census records show he continued to work as a laborer. He never married and he had no children.

Beck did manage to generate one last piece of favorable press during his life. In 1941, the Bainbridge Island Review published a “Meet Your Neighbor” column that featured Beck. It described the Overland Westerners’ equestrian adventure, but left out the hardships of the journey and its tragic end. Instead, it appears Beck embellished a bit during the interview. The article highlights the Overland Westerners numerous appearances at the Panama Pacific International Exposition and on the stage at the Empress Theater in San Francisco, but there’s no evidence that any of those appearances ever occurred. The article also included a short poem written by Beck:

*Let me tell you a story that is most unique,
of a little horse with a world of hidden fame.
In these lines, a little kindness I’ll seek,
for a noble animal tried and true.
Pinto is his name.⁸⁰*

⁷⁹ “Will Publish Story of Famous Journey to State Capitals,” *Mason County Journal*, July 30, 1920.

⁸⁰ “Pinto, Nip, and George Beck See America First,” *Bainbridge Island Review*, Vol. 17, No. 11 (July 25, 1941), 1.

George Beck died at the age of 67 on January 6, 1948 in Port Blakely, Washington, after he reportedly drowned in a roadside ditch while intoxicated.⁸¹

As for the other Overland Westerners, there is little record of what happened to Charles Beck after the ride ended, other than he died sometime prior to 1941. More research is needed. Raymond “Fat” Rayne moved to Seattle after the journey’s anticlimactic end in San Francisco. He married twice but had no children. He went to business school and worked as an accountant.⁸² As a hobby, Rayne maintained a ranch in Issaquah where he raised horses and cows, and regaled his nieces and nephews with stories about his adventures on the trail.⁸³ Rayne died in October of 1967 at the age of 76.

Only Beck’s brother-in-law, Jay Ransome, attempted to find fame in the saddle a second time. On February 19, 1934 the Mason County Journal declared that Ransome, along with Tex Eubanks (“a Texas range land rider”) and Jess Oakley (“a one-time Idaho cowpuncher”), were heading out on “a history making horseback trip the like of which has never before been attempted in America.”⁸⁴ The “Roaming Cowboys,” as they called themselves, planned to replicate the ride of the Overland Westerners, by riding to each state capital -- only this time they intended to take six years instead of three! The trio rode from Washington to Oregon to California, but there is no evidence they made it any farther. Jay died shortly thereafter.

Nip and Pinto returned to Washington with George Beck, where they lived out their final years roaming Bainbridge Island like community pets. They died sometime in the 1920s.

⁸¹ “Overland Westerners.” *National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum*. Web.

⁸² United States Federal Census, 1930. Web.

⁸³ Lois Rayne-Bark, Letter, June 25, 1993, Overland Westerners Collection, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.

⁸⁴ “Roaming Cowboys Start Today on Six-Year Tour of United States,” *Mason County Journal*, February 19, 1934.

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