

Family legacy, collector's choice, researcher's reference

LARIAT AWARD

Created in 2006, the Lariat Award recognizes a company or individual that has shown exceptional support for WWA and for the literature of the American West.

Previous winners include the University of Nebraska Press, University of Oklahoma Press, *True West* magazine, Caxton Press, TwoDot and the late Emil Franzi, host of the Tucson, Arizona, radio program *Voices of the West*.

By Robert Clark

In 1902 English emigrant Arthur H. Clark launched a self-named company in Cleveland, Ohio, publishing in American history, particularly the frontier experience of the 18th and 19th centuries. Trained in the English book tradition during his London apprenticeship in the 1880s, followed by work experience in America at A.C. McClurg in Chicago and Burrows Brothers in Cleveland, he developed a keen eye for scholarship and an appreciation for documentary and research studies in American history.

As noted bookseller Richard Weatherford observed in his introduction to *The Arthur H. Clark Company: An Americana Century* (2002), in 1902 Clark “was already knowledgeable enough about books relating to North America to know what was good and what was merely superficial or popular.” With Burrows Brothers he made his mark with Reuben Gold Thwaites, Secretary of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and the foremost historical editor of his generation, by coordinating publication of the massive 73-volume *Jesuit Relations*



The Arthur H. Clark logo appeared on the title page of almost all publications issued by the company, and on promotional pieces and in advertisements.



and *Allied Documents*.

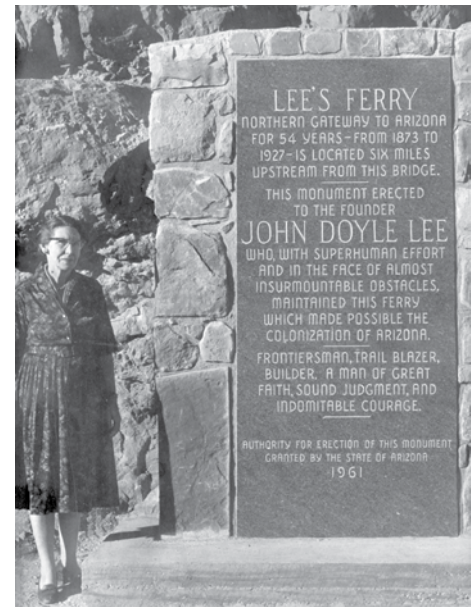
The Arthur H. Clark Company found immediate success with publication of the *Early Western Travels Series* (32 volumes, 1904-1907) edited by Thwaites. Produced with quality and style that became emblematic of the firm, the series made available classic accounts of exploration in the Old Northwest and Appalachian frontier, enhanced by lengthy introductions and copious notes. A tradition was begun.

Academic study of the frontier in American history was relatively new, due in no small measure to Frederick Jackson Turner's influential 1893 thesis regarding its impact on American character. Clark was among the first to ride that wave in the publishing world.

Since then, more than 600 titles have been issued under the Clark Company imprint, either as stand-alone monographs or as parts of named series. The majority focus on the frontier and the Far West. Primary source and reference materials dominate the list. These books have served authors, researchers and students of the West in innumerable ways.

Over the decades the company worked with many luminaries of American historical study, including Herbert Bolton, Archer B. Hulbert, Will Bagley, LeRoy Hafen, Emma Helen Blair, Grace Hebard, Clifford Drury, Grant Foreman, George Bird Grinnell, Rupert Richardson, Carl Coke Rister, Agnes Wright Spring, Dan Thrapp, David J. Weber and many more.

Dozens of the titles have received special recognition, including the Pulitzer Prize in history in 1929 for Fred Shannon's *The Organization and Administration of the Union Army, 1861-1865*. In 1983 the company received its first Spur Award for Carl Briggs's and Clyde Trudell's *Quarterdeck and Saddlehorn: The Story of Edward F. Beale, 1822-1893*. Other award-winning titles include *The Pioneer Camp of the Saints: The 1846 and 1847 Mormon Trail Journals of Thomas Bullock* (1997, Bagley, ed.), Candy Moulton's *Valentine T. McGillicuddy* (2011), David Bigler's *Forgotten Kingdom, The Mormon Theocracy in the American West* (1998), Doug McChristian's *Fort Laramie* (2010), Juanita Brooks's *John D. Lee: Zealot-Pioneer Builder-Scapegoat* (1961), Briton Busch's and Barry Gough's *Fur Traders From New*



Juanita Brooks stands next to the Lee Monument on the Colorado River about the time Arthur H. Clark published Brooks's biography of John D. Lee. "I don't think Juanita necessarily agreed with the assessment of Lee's qualities," Robert Clark says.

Arthur H. Clark Jr., 1964. All photographs courtesy of Robert Clark

England (1997), Polly Aird's *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector* (2009), Bill Shillingberg's *Dodge City* (2010), William Chalfant's *Hancock's War* (2010) and many more.

The company devoted large resources to the publication of multi-volume series on specific topics. The success and acclaim of Thwaites's *Early Western Travels* series was a model to replicate. Notable were the following: Blair and James Alexander Robertson's *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898* (55 volumes, 1903-1908); Ralph P. Bieber and Hafen's *Southwest Historical Series* (12 volumes, 1931-1943); Hafen's *Far West and Rockies Series* (15 volumes, 1954-1961) and *Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West* (10 volumes, 1965-1972); Kenneth L. Holmes's *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails* (11 volumes, 1983-1993); David White's *News of the Plains and Rockies, 1803-1865* (8 volumes, 1996-2001); and Bagley's *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier* (16 volumes, 1997-2018).

Additionally, the company developed genre-focused series to which appropriate manuscripts were added as published. These include *Spain in the West, Frontier Military, Western Lands and Waters, American Trails, Hidden Springs of Custeriana, Western Frontiersmen* and *Northwest Historical Series*.

The company's special fondness for reference works has served libraries, writers and researchers. For example, Thrapp's *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography* (4 volumes, 1988, 1994) offers an accurate reference work containing summaries of the lives of more than 5,500 frontier characters and personalities. Other important reference works cover these topics: Custer (Roger Williams's *Military Register of Custer's Last Command*, 2012); the Plains wars of the late 19th Century (Paul Hedren's *Great Sioux War Orders of Battle*, 2011, and the many documentary works of Richard Hardorff); early California pioneers and documents (Barbara Warner's *Men of the California Bear Flag Revolt*, 1996; Giorgio Perissinotto's *Documenting*



Bookroom of the Arthur Clark Company, 1930, Glendale, California.

Everyday Life in Early Spanish California, 1998; Frances Weber's *Encyclopedia of California's Catholic Heritage*, 2001); Lewis and Clark (Charles Clarke's *Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 1970, 2001, and Jim Garry's *Weapons of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 2012).

In the late 1980s, the company developed a close partnership with the University of Nebraska Press to make many of Clark's publications available as paperbacks in Nebraska's Bison Books series, giving new life to works long unavailable due to the fact that Clark rarely reprinted its titles, instead issuing them in small editions that soon went out-of-print and thereafter became collectibles. This element of the company's business model often met with criticism. But it served to sustain the company not only by controlling overproduction of inventory, but also by enhancing its branding that appealed to collectors and motivating quick purchase of new publications.

Four relocations mark milestones in the company's history: departing Cleveland in 1929, the firm relocated first to Glendale, California (1929-1989), to Spokane, Washington (1989-2006), and finally Norman, Oklahoma. That final move presented unique challenges, both logistical and emotional. For more than a century, three generations of Clarks had stewarded a publishing and book-selling tradition with pride and a small,



devoted staff.

In 2003, a surprising call challenged owners Robert and Sheila Clark's future plans for the company. Charles Rankin, longtime friend and editor-in-chief of University of Oklahoma Press, called to discuss potential paperback projects. As the discussion wound down, Rankin surprised

Robert with a question: Had the Clarks ever considered the possible sale of the company? The question's implication was flattering, but complicated. Legacy, tradition and stewardship were words often used to explain the family's dedication to the business. But in private Sheila and Robert had already begun talking about their long-term plans for the business. Its sale was clearly an option. Both in their mid-50s, big decisions in the next decade or two loomed. The anticipation of carting heavy boxes of books in the warehouse and to book conferences in future decades was unappealing. Additionally, the publishing business was facing radical changes in the burgeoning internet era. The Clarks embraced the opportunity of joining forces with the University of Oklahoma Press.

Negotiations stretched over the next couple of years, and Oklahoma eventually purchased the Clark imprint, inventory, backlist and future contracts. The Clarks moved from Spokane to Norman, Oklahoma, where Robert joined the OU Press staff as publisher of the Clark imprint and assistant director. New publications were soon issued under the Clark imprint from Norman. Existing series added titles. Two new series appeared: *Early California Commentaries* and *Before Gold: California Under Spain and Mexico* under the editorial direction of Robert Senkewicz and Rose Marie Beebe. Michael Tate brought together original accounts of overland migration in the multi-volume *Great Medicine Road*.

The founder's vision, realized in print to serve history, is honored by WWA's recognition.

Robert and Sheila Clark, 2003.