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OWEN WISTER (1860 - 1938) - Author, Roosevelt's Close Friend



Theodore J. Holsten
EMERITUS MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club

Don't you want to come down here and spend a week in the White House, just to rest yourself? I would see a good deal of you at odd moments. You could read, walk about, see the Congressional Library,

and know that you were with people who were very glad to have you in the house.

So wrote Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, to one of his best friends, Owen Wister, in December 1904. Their lifelong close relationship began during their college days when they were both students at Harvard. Wister and his family were frequent visitors both at the White House and at the Roosevelt residence at Sagamore Hill.

The two friends shared a love of the American West. Wister spent several summers there, making his first trip to Wyoming in 1885. He was fascinated with the culture, lore and terrain of the region, and when he started writing, he was inclined toward fiction set on the western frontier. This led toward his most famous novel, *The Virginian*, "A Horseman on the Plains." It took the frontier story to a much higher level than the dime novels that were popular at that time. Wister was regarded as the father of the modern western novel. *The Virginian* went on to several movie and stage productions over the years. Gary Cooper saying, "When you call me that—smile!" was uttered in one of those movie productions.

Theodore Roosevelt was an avid reader of all that Wister wrote. He made many constructive suggestions often incorporated by Wister into his manuscripts. Wister was an early Boone and Crockett Club member, and at Roosevelt's request, he wrote a chapter on his quest for Rocky Mountain goats for the first Acorn book, *American Big Game Hunting*, published by the Boone and Crockett Club in 1893.

Roosevelt's hand-picked successor, William Howard Taft, reversed many of Roosevelt's policies causing much bitterness by the ex-president. This led to Roosevelt's unsuccessful Bull Moose run for the White House in 1912 that split the Republican Party and enabled Woodrow Wilson to gain the presidency. These were disappointing years for Roosevelt. Throughout this period, and until Roosevelt's death in 1919, Wister was in constant contact with him, an uplifting presence. Theirs truly was a lifetime of friendship. ■

Theodore J. Holsten

RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM: *Roosevelt, the Story of a Friendship (1930), Musk-Ox, Bison, Sheep and Goat (1904), The Virginian (1902), George Norman (left) and Owen Wister at the Mammoth Hot Springs, 1887. BOTTOM LEFT:* Wister's chapter with illustration by Carl Rungius. **BELOW:** Owen Wister.

BOOKS BY OWEN WISTER

- Red Men and White (1895)*
- Ulysses S. Grant (1901)*
- Lin McLean (1897)*
- The Virginian (1902)*
- Musk-Ox, Bison, Sheep and Goat (1904)*
Co-Author
- Lady Baltimore (1906)*
- Roosevelt, the Story of a Friendship (1930)*

