

# FROM THE EDITOR



**Greg Tinsley**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
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## Personification of Western Hunting Lore

The historical 100-year arc of The Great American West ending in the year 1900 is certainly among the most enthralling dramas in the annals of world-wide discovery and conquest. Eighteen hundred begins at some point of crescendo for this rich biosphere, a system best represented as an idyllic, continent-scale synchronization of pristine land, primitive hunting-based peoples, and wildlife. It may have been Earth's greatest Divine-form Revelation of ecological harmony: a big, complex work in perfect balance, a utopia absolute.

Were it the scheme of *Homo sapiens* to annihilate and irrevocably alter wildernesses and societies of such size, order and importance, a 1,000-year deadline would seem a feasible time frame. But the American pioneers went one better than simply accomplishing such a feat overnight. Within the relativity of Earth time, they did it during the morning's coffee break, actually jarring up from their manifests after analyzing reports from the frontiers and crosschecking them with their hand-ciphered ledgers to announce the possibility that of some 60 million bison, perhaps there was a real chance that not a single one of them was left alive. Gleaming bone piles became the tallest man-made structures to ever rise above the doomed native soils of the Great Plains.

Most all wholesale atrocities are far less heroic and interesting... And perhaps no published treatment of this period is more accurate, thorough or exquisitely illustrated and designed than Richard C. Rattenbury's *Hunting the American West: The Pursuit of Big Game for Life, Profit, and Sport, 1800-1900*. The importance of a new work of this magnitude and handsomeness is not lost on its publisher, the Boone and Crockett Club, the existence of which was cleaved from the vestiges of this most tragic of the American success stories. The Club spared no expense to bring

this rich, collection-quality hardcover spectacle to light as a 416-page, 12 x 8.75-inch desktop centerpiece tome featuring 425 four-color and black-and-white photographs and illustrations.

Although I personally confess at press time to only the most cursory sweaty-palm goggings and skimming reads of *Hunting the American West's* heavy pages, I do now proclaim my intention to read every main-body sentence and caption, and to much more careful studies of every image, at my earliest convenience. This book seems to make the Old West components of the Time-Life series of my youth appear a bit superficial and unfocused.

B. Byron Price, director of the Charles M. Russell Center for the Study and Art of the American West in Norman, Oklahoma, has read it. He exclaims:

*"The subject of hunting in the 19th century American West has never been fully explored by scholars. Richard Rattenbury helps fill this gap with the first comprehensive narrative dealing with big-game hunting for subsistence, sport and profit. Ranging from the earliest aboriginal hunters to the conservation movements of the early 20th century, the scope of Rattenbury's work is broad, his characters colorful and his conclusions telling. Characterized by sound scholarship and a pleasing writing style, this lavishly illustrated book will appeal to general readers and specialists alike."*

This big-game hunting epic is certainly filled with story and imagery celebrating all aspects of the times, including the most romantic tools ever devised: from strong, short bows to elaborate silver-mounted knife sets circa 1885 by Gotham's Tiffany and Company; from the utensils of the master stone-smith spearmen to the super-ornate lever-action shooters of the aristocratic sportsman, and everything in between.

*Hunting the American West* appears to be a legacy capstone for author Rattenbury, the distinguished curator of history at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. His previous books include, *Packing Iron: Gunleather of the Frontier West* and *The Art of American Arms Makers*.

I certainly have every intention of a complete reading of this book during the upcoming holidays, and I heartily recommend the same to you and yours. Without the exclusive knowledge found in a wonderfully illustrated volume like *Hunting the American West*, I believe that the perspective of the modern-day sportsman is notably incomplete, no matter how successful and celebrated his current game-getting efforts may be. ■

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See a sneak peak from the pages of our latest book on page 58!