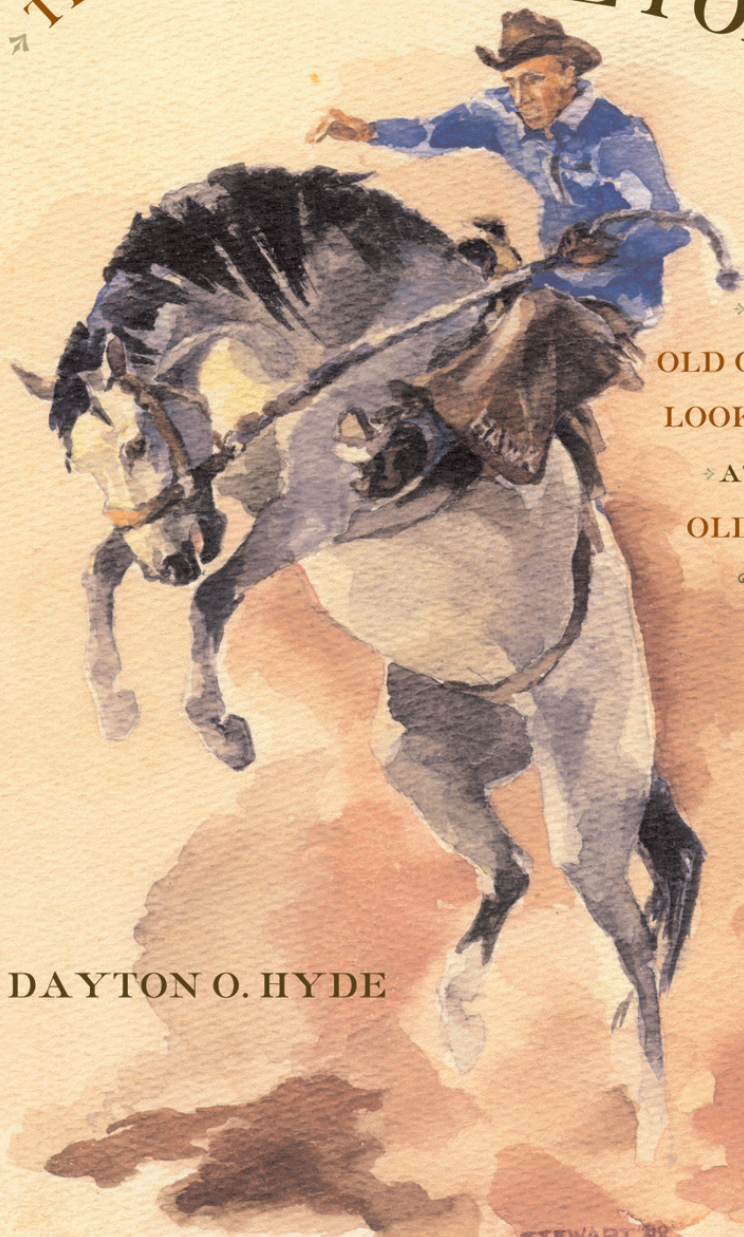


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—LARRY MCMURTRY

# THE PASTURES OF BEYOND



▷AN◁  
OLD COWBOY  
LOOKS BACK  
▷AT THE◁  
OLD WEST



DAYTON O. HYDE

STEWART '98

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OF BEYOND

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AN OLD COWBOY  
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This book is dedicated to  
Slim Pickens, Mel Lambert,  
Montie Montana, Dick Blue,  
and every other cowboy that  
forked a bronc or threw a loop.

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## Chapter Two

**I** WASN'T SURE MY UNCLE HEARD ME ask about riding a horse, for he gave no sign, just turned and walked out of the house. I followed, but he ignored me, and so I wandered off. The bunkhouse and corrals were deserted, and I whiled away a few hours looking at wildflowers on the meadows and watching warblers mate in the willows, wishing that I had someone to talk to, wishing that I could learn to ride so that the next time Rose offered me her horse, I would be able to impress her.

I was shaking with hunger but wasn't about to ask the old man for food. That afternoon, just when my hunger pains were about to overcome my pride, the old man came bustling around a willow bush, tossed me a brown bag containing a meat sandwich he'd made for me, and told me to get into his car, that he needed someone to open gates.

I was to learn that my uncle hated to open gates and would put up with anyone handy as a passenger as long as he didn't have to get out of his car.

He drove a big, fancy, four-door Chrysler and treated it like a pickup truck, driving out over irrigated fields, rocks, and fallen trees as though it were impossible to get stuck. Whenever he drove down through the ranch, the crew kept



a team of draft horses harnessed just in case. On this, my first ride with him, he had hardly gone a mile down the ranch when he gunned through a slough lickety-split, and buried that big green monster right to the axles. I started walking for help, but a couple of cowboys had been watching from afar and met me halfway with the team. The old cowboy driving the horses winked at me and shook his head. It was about the first friendly gesture I'd seen since my arrival, and my homesickness vanished in a flash.

While the men were hooking up chains to ease the car out of the mud, the old man took a shovel out of the trunk and informed me that it was time I learned how to irrigate. With the shovel over his shoulder, he stalked off across the flooded plain, inspecting the flow of icy springwater as it coursed down ditches and spread out over the grass through small cuts in the ditch bank.

Here and there he stopped to build a sod dam in a ditch, or put boards in a wooden irrigation box. I watched his every move, trying to learn. My legs grew numb from wading in cold water, and now and again I would leave a tennis shoe sticking in the mud and have to probe for it. Maybe deafness had affected his balance, for my uncle couldn't walk a straight line to save his soul from hell. Every time he changed directions unannounced, the shovel over his shoulder would come about like the boom on a sailboat and clout me alongside the head with a clang. Off he would go on another tangent.

The water flowed from a dam at the headwaters of the Williamson River, a crystalline stream rising from fault lines along the base of the pine-clad ridges. With that water, my

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uncle flood irrigated some two thousand acres of timothy, bluegrass, and clover, catching the water up in a series of small earthen dams, and redistributing it as it flowed down through the long valley.

Once the cowboys had used the team to pull the car to dry ground, the old man headed back, put his shovel in the trunk, and slammed the lid.

“Don’t know how the hell I got stuck there,” he muttered to the men. “Been through that slough a thousand times.”

The men looked away so as not to be caught grinning.

A road of sorts wandered along the meadow at the edge of the valley. My uncle seemed to drive by memory, looking out over the meadows and seldom at the road. The branch of a pine tree smacked my window, causing me to jump and throw up my hands to protect my face.

Seeing me make a fool of myself put my uncle in a good mood.

“Those BarYs of mine are damn fine Hereford cattle,” he bragged as we drove through the cows and calves that had arrived the day before. When the road finally skirted the dams and hugged the main channel of the Williamson, we had to stop at every bend to look down at the huge shadows of trout lurking like logs in the bottoms of the pools. I had already been smitten by Rose, the Indian girl; now I fell in love with the ranch. I was aching not only to ride a horse, but to get after those big trout.

During that trip down the valley, the man became more and more expansive, and I guessed that much of his early reticence was due to shyness. He drove with his hearing aid

unplugged and the batteries eloquently placed in the ashtray where I could see them, indicating thus that I was not expected to interrupt with a comment. He never glanced at me when he talked, and might have been addressing the cows, the fish, or the pine trees.

I sat there as he drove, bouncing with every jolt, watching the scenery, thinking over what little I had heard about the man. He was my mother's favorite brother, and the son of the Reverend G. Mott Williams, bishop of the Episcopal diocese of northern Michigan.

Being the son of clergy, he grew up proving to other kids he was no sissy. He learned how to fight, and adopted the name of Buck instead of Dayton, maybe because it sounded tough. This I understood, for I had been named Dayton after my uncle but felt much more comfortable with the nickname of Hawk. To me the name fit right into my plans to be a cowboy.

At thirteen, Buck proceeded to make a small stake hunting deer for the logging camps, which set up a standard for my own independence. At fifteen he ran away from home to live with Cree Indians in the vicinity of Great Bear Lake in Canada. In one of the worst winters in history, he holed up in a small cabin and lived out the winter on beaver meat from his trapline. By spring he had developed scurvy, and as a result lost most of his hearing.

Across the ridge from him lived a Cree family, consisting of a man, his wife, several children, and an old grandmother. When the man froze to death on his trapline, the woman saved her children by feeding them the grandmother.

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When spring came, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police took my uncle to Edmonton to testify at the woman's trial. Through my uncle's testimony, the woman was acquitted. "After all," my uncle delighted in saying, "they'd eaten the evidence."

According to my mother, when he tired of living a wilderness life he drifted south by railroad, through Portland, and then to San Francisco. His looks and charm brought him ready acceptance in Bay Area society, and he had enough income from his mother's inherited farms near Detroit to live rather well. A stage-door Johnny, he surrounded himself with actresses and lived on the top floor of the new St. Francis Hotel with his Airedale dog, captivating all who would listen with his tales of the far north.

Almost trapped into a social marriage, he sought the wilderness again, taking a job locating vast timber holdings in the Northwest for such railroad giants as the Harrimans, who were interested in investing some of their fortune in Oregon. While appraising timber for his new bosses, he stumbled upon that magic valley in southern Oregon that contained the headwaters of the Williamson River. In spite of a lack of major financing, he began putting together the large cattle ranching complex known as Yamsay Land and Cattle Company, whose brand was the BarY, and whose headquarters ranch was Yamsi. Both "Yamsi" and "Yamsay" were taken from Yamsay Mountain, high above the ranch, which Klamath Indians called "the home of the north wind."

My gentle mother lost faith in her adored brother when Buck visited his uncle Will Biddle in Portland, Oregon, and

ran off with Will's wife, Margaret. On her divorce from Will, Margaret became my uncle's partner in his endeavors. That relationship was already fraying when I arrived at Yamsi, which may have accounted for the fact that the great stone house was often empty.

A year before the economic crash of 1929, Buck hired Margaret's son-in-law, a well-known Portland architect, Jamison Parker, to draw up plans for a large house at Yamsi, to be built out of native lava rock and huge ponderosa pines cut from the virgin forest around them. My uncle had a pal named Mortenson in Klamath Falls who owned a sawmill, and Buck was able to select the boards for the interior himself. These were hauled by steam locomotive over a logging track to a point ten miles from the ranch, and taken the rest of the way by team and wagon.

For a moment as I drove with my uncle, my reveries were shattered by a mule deer doe which darted in front of the car and plunged into the river. Lost in thought, my uncle didn't seem to notice that close call, and I went on with my thoughts.

The old man had a thing for towers, and the original plans included one as tall as the neighboring pine trees. Using cowboy help, Buck completed the house at a cost of eight thousand dollars. It included a foundation for the tower, but that edifice was never built, possibly because the Depression came along to put a brake on his spending.

Despite hard economic times, Buck and Margaret Biddle managed to turn the house into a showcase, filled with rare antiques from Europe and a superb collection of Oriental rugs. Such elegance tended to build a cultural gap between

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Buck and the cowboys. He might own a fine herd of cattle, but the men would never accept him as I wanted to be accepted, as a real hand.

Being the boss's nephew and ignorant of all facets of ranch life, I was beginning to realize that I would have to battle hard to belong. No one had to tell me that to be respected by the men, I would have to beat them at their own cowboy games.

As I rode along in the big car, I reflected that I had been at the ranch three days and still hadn't ridden a horse or talked to a cowboy. With the impatience of youth, I felt that life was slipping past quickly and there was no more time to waste.

I was about to shout at my uncle and see if he had any vestige of hearing when he ran his Chrysler over a big pine stump. I flew up out of the seat, hit my head on the ceiling, and saw stars. My neck felt broken, and I moved my fingers carefully, happy to find that they still worked.

"Who the hell left that stump in the road?" Buck grumbled. He wasn't driving on the road, having left it a couple hundred yards back, but I wasn't about to make that point.

As he drove onward, he talked about places I'd never heard about, the BK Ranch, the Grigsby place, Wocus Bay, and Klamath Marsh. I looked at the instrument panel and saw that the radiator was overheating. I had no way of telling him, but pointed at the temperature gauge. He ignored me until a big cloud of steam arose from the radiator, obscuring the forest ahead. Fortunately we were still close to the river, and he let the engine cool, then carried up enough water from the river in his hat.

As we took off again, I hoped that my whole life here wouldn't consist of riding in his Chrysler, opening gates. The world I'd seen here so far was pretty small. Beyond the trout in the river and the horses I saw only at a distance, I was starting to think that maybe I should have stayed in Michigan.

What I did not appreciate was that at the time of my arrival on Buck's doorstep, the BarY was a great old-style livestock outfit, a rough, tough cattle and horse operation running seven thousand head of fine Hereford cattle and two hundred and fifty mostly Percheron broodmares. The land consisted of an eleven-thousand-acre holding on a vast plain at the foot of the Cascade Mountains, known as Klamath Marsh; a lease option on the BK, a great hay ranch in the Bly Valley; and the headquarters ranch, Yamsi, at the head of the Williamson River, plus ninety thousand acres or so of range leased from the Klamath Indians. Most of the cattle were shipped south every fall to winter on ranches in northern California, west of the town of Williams.

Despite its size, the total amount of rolling equipment on the BarY consisted of one old cabover truck with stock racks, one D2 Caterpillar tractor, a couple of pickup trucks, and my uncle's Chrysler. This equipment was rotated from one ranch to another according to dire need. The old man was tight with his money, and men and horses were cheap.

When cowboys moved from one ranch to another, they tied their belongings behind their saddles and took off a-horseback cross-country. There seldom were roads going where they wanted to go. The company was well known in

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the West less for its fine cattle than for other reasons. One frustrated cowboy described the BarY as being “just one big mismanaged emergency after another.”

Buck still hadn't acknowledged my request to ride a horse, but the morning after our trip down the valley, I was roused out of bed at three in the morning by the foreman, fed a plate of greasy fried eggs and bacon, stuck on a sleepy sorrel horse called Yellowstone, and forced to trot along with three silent cowboys to Klamath Marsh, some fifty miles away.

The old, worn Porter saddle issued me immediately began to shape my young bones to its contours, and the hair on the inside of my legs was worn off on the first mile and has never grown back. Every muscle of my body ached, but I would have died rather than complain. For three days we worked cattle on the Marsh ranch, separating out cows without calves as well as any that needed dehorning.

That job done, we headed east again, forded the Williamson at a place called Little Wocus Bay, and trotted the fifty miles or so back to Yamsi. Yellowstone seemed to me to be awfully rough-gaited, but he was my first horse and I had nothing to compare him to. The last mile was unbearable agony. I had a green-apple bellyache from trotting, and my eyes refused to focus. As I slid from the saddle, both knees buckled with excruciating pain, but I shoved myself off the ground and unsaddled Yellowstone by myself, then turned him out into the corral to roll with the other horses.

That night I soaked in a hot bath, carefully peeling off bunches of dead skin from my inner legs. By morning I was



determined to ride again. At dawn, I scrambled myself some eggs and hurried over to the barn, hoping that the cowboys had not left without me.

The foreman, a tough little cowboy named Ern Morgan, seemed surprised to see me. Since Yellowstone needed a rest, he issued me a big gray horse named BK Heavy. I think that everyone expected Heavy to buck me off. The corral fence was lined with cowboys, but the big gray tolerated my clumsy efforts to mount, and soon I had joined two old cowboys who were headed thirty miles to the north, to gather any BarYs that had strayed off their range.

The two old men were more talkative than the others. As we rode north through the ranch, the cowboys told story after story, and I learned to keep abreast of them so as not to miss a word they said. Their talk was of horses and women. It took me quite a while to realize that the girls they discussed with evident affection were prostitutes in Klamath Falls. I could only guess at a female's anatomy, and there was nothing I could contribute to the conversation.

We found a few BarYs scattered amongst cattle belonging to the Kittredge outfit, and some Indian Department cows with conspicuous ID brands on their ribs issued by the Department of the Interior to an Indian, Charlie Lenz, in return for a share in the calf crop. I learned to read the ownership of cattle by their brands and earmarks, and by three that afternoon we had started driving the BarYs south toward my uncle's range.

At first the cowboys treated me like a chore they had been saddled with, but maybe they sensed my eagerness to

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learn, for they soon relaxed and even managed a grin or two at my blunders. One of the cowboys rolled a Bull Durham cigarette and handed it to me, but as I tried to light it, I sucked all the tobacco into my mouth and had such a fit of choking I scared my horse and almost landed on the ground. I grabbed the saddle horn with such a death grip that I was able to pull myself back on.

I glanced furtively at the cowboys, thinking they might be laughing at me, but their sunburned faces were cast in bronze. The cows at that moment chose to slip off into some jack-pine thickets, and we were busy for the next half hour trying to get them back on the trail.