

ZANE GREY

OUR AREA'S MOST FAMOUS RESIDENT

(Christopher Creek, Payson, Pine, Star Valley, and Strawberry, Arizona)

In his writings, Zane Grey was rather straight forward. As the reader, you normally could expect that his main character would be a man running from a negative past. Before you finished the book, the reasonably dashing man would have righted a few wrongs, stolen the heart of a girl that suffered great anguish and eventually prospered in the spectacular landscape of the West.

Zane Grey, on the other hand, was much more complex. He was born on January 31, 1872 in Zanesville, Ohio, to a domineering father that was a dentist and a mother that followed the traditions of the time. Zane Grey's christened name was Pearl Zane Gray [not Grey]. Since he did not like his name he changed it, as a young adult, to Zane Grey.

As a teen, Pearl enjoyed being a boy and relished any opportunity to partake in the game of baseball. His leisure time was spent with his brother fishing or following the fun of hobbies. His father believed that Pearl should be more focused and should not waste his time in youthful folly.

When the time came for Pearl to seek a profession his father directed him towards dentistry. While attending the University of Pennsylvania on a baseball scholarship, Pearl waxed between the realization that he was destined to do as his father directed instead of following his passion of a baseball career.

Zane graduated in 1896 and opened a dental practice in New York City. Overall he was not a dedicated master of his profession and he routinely took off to fish in the upper Delaware River. If that was not enough, Zane played baseball at the drop of a hat.

Grey had a secret desire to be a writer. His first documented attempt was his fishing story in the journal Recreation in 1902. Though not formally trained, Grey felt he had a family history that would make a great novel. Supposedly there was a diary of his ancestors in Zanesville but to this day no document has been found.

Grey based his first novel on one person. Betty Zane, a family matriarch, was heralded as the person that saved the fledgling frontier settlement of Fort Henry in 1782. She was credited with dashing through a barrage of bullets and saving the day by bringing a tablecloth of dry gun powder to the troops repelling the British and Indians. Zaneville was named after her family.

Published in 1903, "Betty Zane" was not a literary success. Not to be deterred, he wrote two more novels, "The Spirit of the Border" (1906) and "The Last Trail" (1907). The trilogy, as they are called, had a writing style of Cooper. Collectively, Grey was a failing author.

Zane was successful in one very important area. He courted and married Lina Roth in 1905. Lina, whom Zane lovingly called Dolly, became his proofreader and motivator. She financed Grey's early career. Without her he likely would not have followed his dream to become a well-read writer. Together they raised three children; Romer, Betty and Loren. The bulk of the parenting fell to Dolly because Grey was usually away researching in the West, on a fishing boat or waist high in a cold-water river angling for another record.

A major turning point for Grey was an opportunity to experience the real west--the West of the last pioneers, the cowboys and the fortune hunters. In 1907 he headed for Northern Arizona to join an expedition with Charles Jesse "Buffalo" Jones to literally rope mountain lions. Of course, the trip became the basis for a book.

His trip to Arizona became an epiphany for Grey. He saw, firsthand, the freshness of wide-open spaces and stars by the billions. He heard the silence of fresh snow, tasted the smells of dew on the high desert and met men who could be trusted and immediately respected. He was immersed in "the Code of the West."

"The Heritage of the Desert" (1910) was Zane's first big success. It followed a time-honored script of the man that is weak, sickly or in need of physical growth who comes out west. The heroine is soundly rescued, the villain is vanquished and everything is basically set straight by the closing paragraph on the last page.

Overall, Zane Grey was a writer of romance novels. He did write many books for boys. Nineteen of his westerns are set in the twentieth century. Even in the 1930s, Grey was able to blend the cowboy type hero and a college bound heroine in an area of Los Angeles. Together they found excitement as one would expect in a Roy Rogers matinee film. Yes, the West lives on and on.

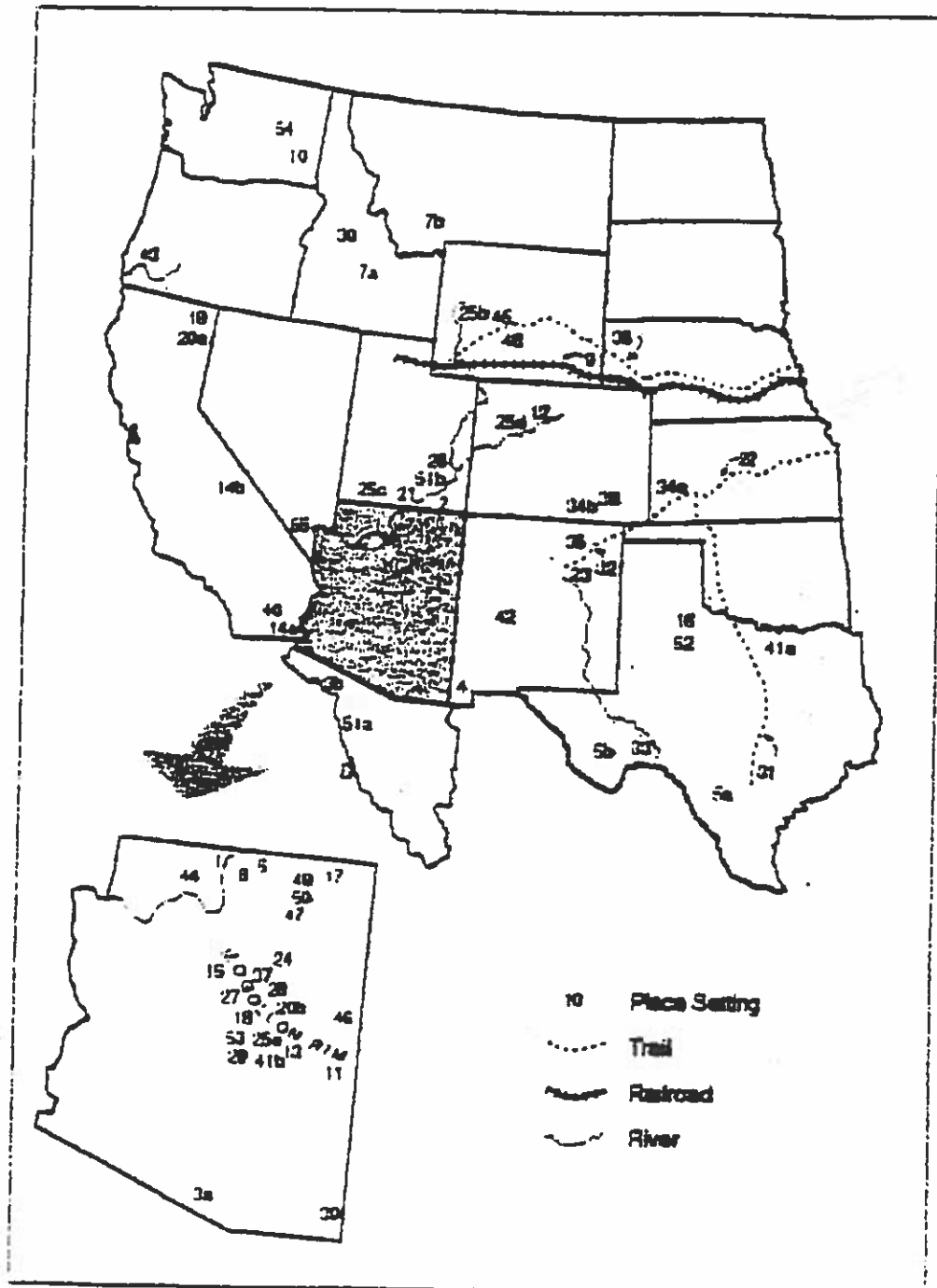
Zane has almost ninety books in print. Sixty are westerns, nine concern fishing and his world record fresh and salt water catches, three trace his roots and the Zanes of Ohio, and the others center on juvenile fiction, baseball stories and a biography of George Washington in his youth. There are books dealing with his anti-war sentiment (WWI), recollections of an Arizona hunting trip and excursions written in the first person. In addition, short stories for magazines were written for quick cash money. Over 130 films have been produced based on Zane Grey books.

The areas around Payson (the Rim Communities) and Arizona are very fortunate to have Zane Grey as a most important resident. For a number of years he had a cozy cabin near Tonto Creek where he used to sit on his front porch and write. The lasting impressions of the charm, beauty and mystique of the Rim area, as well as some of our earlier residents, will live on in his sought after books.

Scholars agree that twenty-four books by Zane Grey were written with Arizona as a vital setting. Of the twenty-four, fourteen are set above or below the Mogollon Rim. Over a third of Zane's Arizona-based novels use the general area from Oak Creek Canyon to the Pleasant Valley in Young, Arizona.

As you drive or hike our beautiful communities and forests, please appreciate that the West still lives and reigns king. That cowboy you see in the distance might be an illusion or just possibly could be the great great grandson of someone Zane Grey used to model his hero after in his most current western novel.

Zane Grey passed away on October 23, 1939 in Altadena, California, of heart failure. He'll always be missed.



Setting of Zane Grey's western novels in the American West and Sonora, Mexico. For more information about Zane Grey, his writings, biographers or any incidental information concerning his much heralded history, please go to www.zanegreysws.org.