

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

August 9, 2017

The Wild, Wild West  
Or Something to Think About

A few weeks ago I decided to read some Western novels. I never liked them but it has been decades since I even tried to read one that I decided to read a few and see what I thought of them now that I'm older.

Some novels are good - well-written and interesting. Some are lame as can be. But a thought occurred to me as I read stories set in the Old West of the late 19th century. It seems like such a long time ago. Most Westerns are based on events occurring between the Civil War and the turn of the century (1865-1900). That was the hey day of the wild west with repeating rifles, revolvers and a lot of ex-soldiers looking for excitement and adventure.

Even though it seems like a long time ago, there's a way of looking at it which brings home how little time has really passed. I was born in 1954. At that time, there were still people alive who were alive during the Civil War. There may have even been someone alive who fought in the Civil War as a teen-ager. My birth was only one lifetime away from the Civil War. I wonder how many old gunfighters, outlaws and marshals from the late 19th century were still alive when I was born? Many Western novels (which are still in print) were written in the early 1900s by people who actually witnessed or experienced events similar to their stories.

Then it occurred to me that the Revolutionary War was only 90 years before the Civil War. There was probably someone alive during the Civil War who was alive during the Revolutionary War. I am only 2 lifetimes away from the Declaration of Independence. I suppose I could do some research and actually find specific people who were alive during those periods. If I live until 2050, any person who knows me at that time would only be separated from the revolutionary War by 3 lifetimes. That sounds a lot shorter than the 274 years between 1776 and 2050.

Like I said in the title, something to think about.