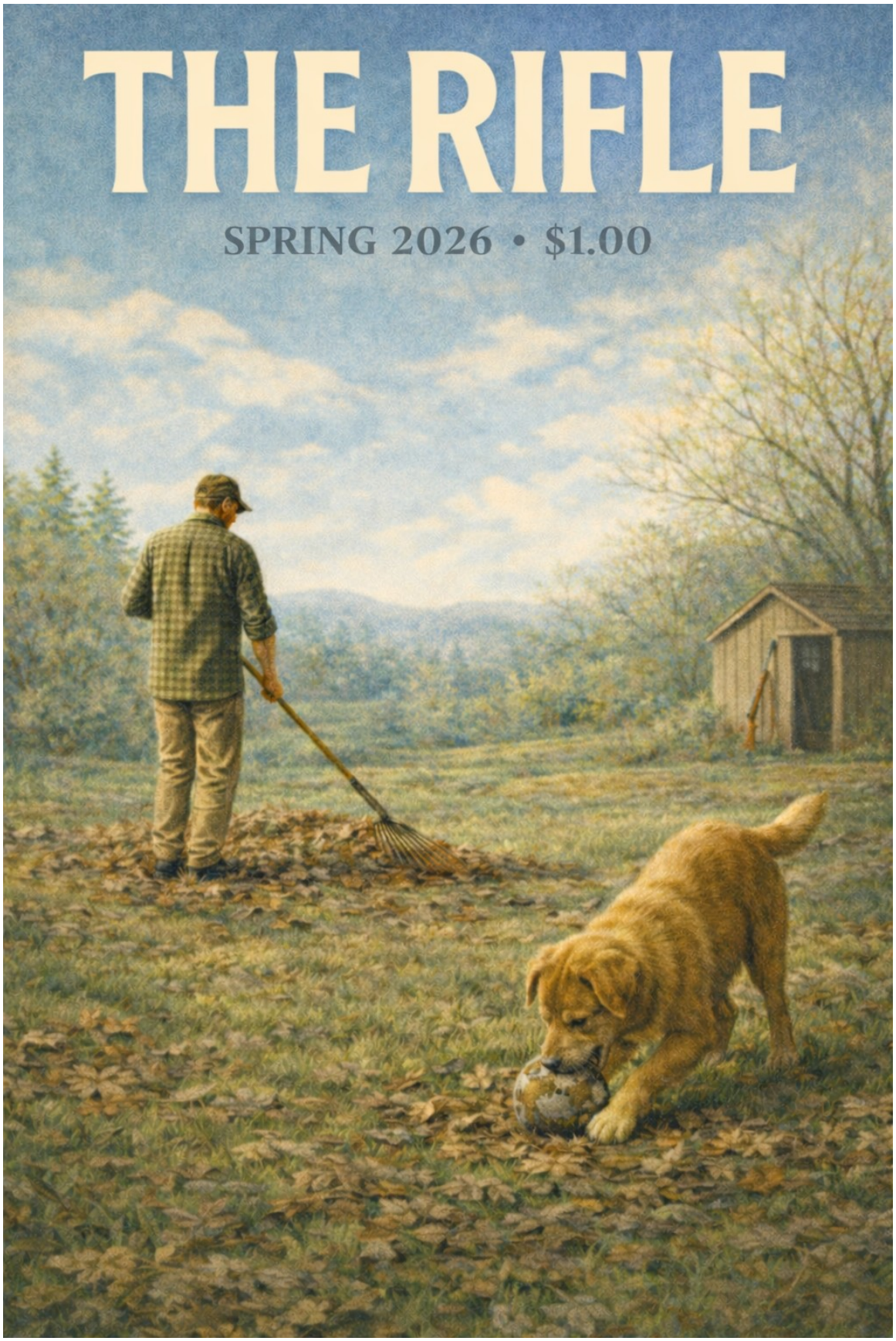
THE RIFLE
SPRING 2026 • $1.00

The Rifle

For Gentlemen Who Notice Details Others Miss

Issue 2 • Volume 1 • Quarterly • March • 2026

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- *No Bitterness*

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"When the Day Is Earned, the Cup Should Be Worth It."

Toi-Oda Tea and Biscuit Company
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Suppliers of Honest Refreshment

WELCOME TO ISSUE TWO

A Note from the Editor

When we launched *The Rifle* on the Winter Solstice, we did so quietly, without fanfare, trusting that the right readers would find their way to these pages. You did. For that, we are genuinely grateful.

We are, as you may have noticed, still learning the art of bringing a publication into the modern world. Technology has its own opinions about formatting, margins, and the proper placement of a photograph, and we have had several spirited disagreements with it. We ask your continued patience and good humor as we find our footing. The content, we are confident in. The pixels, we are still negotiating.

Issue Two arrives in the spirit of spring, renewal, remembrance, and the particular quality of American light that falls across a baseball diamond in April or a cemetery in late May. We have filled these pages with history both celebrated and quiet. You will find here men and women of extraordinary talent and accomplishment who gave this country beauty, laughter, courage, and art, and who, in many cases, received in return suspicion, silence, or worse.

We see them. We thought you might too.

As always, *The Rifle* is a humble offering, nostalgia tempered by honesty, gravitas worn lightly. We are glad you are back.

Welcome home.

SPRING PREPAREDNESS

A Gentleman's Guide to the Season of Renewal

There is a particular satisfaction in the man who meets spring ready. Who has cleaned what needed cleaning, prepared what needed preparing, and set his mind and body in order before the first warm wind arrives. This is not merely practical wisdom. It is a form of respect — for the season, for the work, and for those who taught us these things and are no longer here to do them.

THE RIFLE

The season of hunting has passed. The marsh is quiet now, the fields returning to green. Before you put your rifle away for the summer, give it the attention it deserves.

Begin with an unloaded chamber. This is not a suggestion. Run a clean patch through the bore, follow it with a lightly oiled one, and finish dry. Wipe down the stock with a good linen cloth. Check the action. Check the sights. Look for anything winter may have done without your permission.

When you are satisfied, wrap it properly and store it in a cool dry place away from direct light. A good rifle properly cared for will outlast the man who owns it and serve the next generation just as faithfully.

There is something quietly ceremonial about this, the putting away of tools at the end of their season. Our grandfathers understood this without being told.

THE YARD

Winter leaves behind evidence of itself. Broken branches, matted leaves, the general dishevelment of a landscape that has been through something difficult. Spring asks you to address this.

Begin at the perimeter and work inward. Rake what needs raking. Remove what winter killed. Cut back what grew beyond its station last fall and never got properly addressed.

This is not glamorous work. It is necessary work, which is a different and more honorable thing. A man who keeps his yard in order keeps other things in order as well. His neighbors know this. His family knows this. Somewhere, his father knows this.

The first Saturday of real spring warmth, given entirely to the yard, is one of the more satisfying days a man can spend.

:

THE GARDEN

A garden requires an act of faith. You put something in the ground in the cold and trust that warmth and water and time will do what they have always done. This trust is not naive. It is earned, season by season, by every man and woman who has ever knelt in spring soil and believed in what was coming.

Clear the beds first. Last year's stalks and stems have done their work and can go. Turn the soil when it is ready, not before. Soil worked too early, when it is still cold and wet, will compact and resist you all summer. It will tell you when it is ready. Learn to listen.

Plant what your table needs. Plant something for no reason other than beauty. A garden that feeds only the stomach has missed half its purpose.

Our ancestors planted by the moon, by the saint’s days, by signs we have mostly forgotten. They were not wrong to do so. There is wisdom in paying attention to things larger than yourself.

THE SHED

The shed is where a man's intentions go to wait. The project half finished, the tool borrowed and returned to the wrong hook, the can of something whose label has faded to illegibility.

Spring is the reckoning.

Go through it properly. Sharpen what is dull. Oil what is dry. Discard what is beyond saving and resist the temptation to keep it anyway just in case. You know what just in case really means. It means never.

Organize your tools so that each one has a place and returns to that place after use. This sounds simple. It is simple. It is also something most men manage for approximately two weeks before entropy reasserts itself. Try anyway. The trying matters

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THE GRILL

Uncover it. Inspect the grates. Clean what winter left behind. Check the connections if it runs on gas. Replace what needs replacing before you need it rather than the moment your guests arrive. The first fire of the season is a small ceremony worth observing properly. There is no rush. Let it come to temperature. Stand beside it for a moment before you put anything on it.

Summer is coming. You are ready.

THE BODY

Winter asks very little of a man physically. It asks him to stay warm, to shovel when necessary, and to resist the particular inertia that comes with short days and long evenings. Most men comply with all three rather too enthusiastically.

Spring asks more.

Begin simply. Walk before you run, in every sense of the phrase. The body that has spent three months in relative stillness does not benefit from being suddenly reminded of its capabilities at full volume. A daily walk of genuine length, taken at a pace that means something, is where spring fitness begins.

Return to physical labor where you can find it. The yard work, the garden, the shed — these are not merely chores. They are the oldest form of exercise known to man, performed by every generation before us without the need to call it anything other than what needed doing.

The body knows spring is coming before the mind does. Trust it.

THE MIND

A man's reading often suffers in winter. The evenings are long but the concentration short, and the temptation of easier entertainments is always present. No judgment here. Winter has its own demands.

Spring light changes things. There is a quality to afternoon light in April that makes a man want to think clearly again, to read seriously, to return to the books he put down in November with good intentions.

Pick one up. Not the easiest one on the shelf. The one that has been waiting longest.

A reading list renewed in spring, pursued through summer, completed by autumn — this is one of the more quietly satisfying achievements available to a man of any age. It costs nothing. It changes everything.

THE SPIRIT

This requires no doctrine and no apology.

Find a morning this spring, early, before the household wakes and before the obligations of the day assert themselves. Go outside. Stand in whatever passes for quiet where you live. Look at what is returning to life around you.

That is enough. That is, in fact, quite a lot.

A man who makes no provision for his interior life will find, eventually, that he has been running on fumes without knowing it. Spring is the natural season for this accounting. What was heavy in winter can sometimes be set down now. What was dormant can be allowed to stir.

The garden requires faith. So does this.

LETTING GO

Winter accumulates things inside a man that have no name and therefore no easy address. Grievances nursed through long dark evenings. Regrets that grew heavier with each cold morning. The particular weight of things left unsaid, undone, unresolved.

Spring does not automatically relieve any of this. But it offers the conditions under which a man might choose to.

The rake pulled across the matted winter lawn is doing two things at once if you let it. The soil turned in the garden bed is making room for more than seeds. The shed organized and set in order is a rehearsal for other kinds of order.

This is not therapy. It is older than therapy. Every culture that has ever observed a spring festival has understood instinctively that the season is an invitation to release what the cold months accumulated and begin again with lighter hands.

You do not have to carry everything forward. Some of it can stay behind with the winter.

A MOMENT OF REMEMBRANCE

These tasks we have described, the rifle cleaned and stored, the yard raked, the garden turned, the shed set in order, the body and mind and spirit attended to, none of them originated with us.

We learned them. From fathers and grandfathers, from neighbors and teachers, from men and women who rose before us and did these same things in these same seasons without being asked. They did them because they understood that a life well maintained is a form of dignity. A form of gratitude.

Some of them are gone now.

Before you go inside, before the day takes you fully, bow your head for a moment in the direction of whoever taught you these things. Say their name if you remember it.

They are why you know what you know.

They deserve that much.

SECTION TWO

THE SILVER SCREEN

When Hollywood Discovered the Athletic Ideal

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS
The King of Hollywood
1883 — 1939

He arrived in the world on May 23, 1883, in Denver, Colorado, as Douglas Elton Thomas Ullman, the son of Hezekiah Charles Ullman, a lawyer and Civil War veteran, and Ella Adelaide Marsh, a woman of considerable strength and determination who would need every ounce of both. When Douglas was five years old his father, a hard drinker and difficult man, abandoned the family entirely. The boy who would become the most celebrated physical specimen in American entertainment grew up in the shadow of that departure, raised by a mother who took in boarders to keep the household together and who gave her son the name of a previous husband, John Fairbanks, so that he might carry something steadier into the world than the name of a man who had walked away.

His mother's hard work financing his education included two years at the Jarvis Military Academy, stage training, and five months at Harvard, where the main attraction appears to have been the gymnasium and the sports facilities. This tells you everything you need to know about Douglas Fairbanks before he became Douglas Fairbanks. The boy was drawn to his body and what it could do. The classroom was an obligation. The gymnasium was a calling.

He took his father's abandonment and converted it into fuel. From an early age, daring adventure became an outlet for over-abundant emotions and would determine the important moves in his life. Fear was never to affect him. Athletic vigor and smiling good humor became a pattern of living. A lesser man might have been diminished by what happened to his family. Fairbanks was forged by it.

THE STAGE

By age eleven he was performing on stage and quickly became popular. This was not a hobby. The family needed money and Douglas went out and earned some. There is something clarifying about necessity. It strips away the luxury of hesitation and replaces it with action. Fairbanks would spend his entire career in motion, and it began here, on provincial stages, a boy doing what needed doing.

By the time he reached New York the raw energy had been refined into something usable. After college study Fairbanks began playing stage bit parts and by 1914 had become a popular Broadway actor. His Broadway debut came in 1902 in Her Lord and Master, and over the following decade he developed a reputation as a reliable, energetic stage presence. He was not a subtle actor and never claimed to be. He was a force of nature in a gentleman's suit, and New York audiences responded to that straightforwardly.

The stage taught him timing, projection, and the fundamental lesson that an audience's attention is not given — it is taken. He took it every night.

HOLLYWOOD CALLS

He made his film debut in 1915 and quickly became one of the most popular and highest paid actors in Hollywood. The transition from stage to screen was not smooth for everyone in that era. Many stage actors found the camera reductive, cold, and unable to capture what they did in a theater. Fairbanks had the opposite experience. The camera loved him completely and without reservation.

In his first film, The Lamb, Fairbanks played a resourceful, amiable hero, a role he would replicate in many of his films. The public loved confident, cheerful leading men, and Fairbanks oozed optimism. He was thirty one years old when he walked onto a film set for the first time, not a young man by the standards of the industry, but a man fully formed, certain of himself, and in absolute command of what his body could do.

He went to work initially with the innovative D.W. Griffith at Triangle Film Corporation. In just his first year, the spectacular success of open-air adventures like The Lamb and The Good Bad Man and farcical comedies like His Picture in the Papers encouraged him to form his own production company, the Douglas Fairbanks Film Corporation. This is worth pausing on. One year into his film career, Fairbanks understood that the only way to control the work was to own the means of producing it. He was not merely a performer. He was an entrepreneur with a performer's gift, and that combination would make him one of the most powerful figures in the early industry.

His early films were social comedies — pictures where he played an effete aristocrat tested by the rigors of cowboy life, a bandit and an Indian seeking the legitimacy of society, erasing altogether the boundaries that separated the cowboy from the clubman. These were not trivial entertainments. They were explorations of American identity, of what it meant to be a man in a country that was still defining itself, told through the medium of an irresistibly physical human being who made the whole argument with his body rather than his words.

THE ATHLETIC IDEAL

Before we go further, the body deserves its own paragraph.

Douglas Fairbanks was, by any standard of any era, a physical specimen. He practiced gymnastics daily. He boxed seriously. He fenced with instructors who held him to exacting standards because he demanded it. He studied with physical culture advocates of the period, corresponded with them, wrote about exercise and health, and maintained a discipline that his contemporaries found remarkable and slightly baffling.

Undressed, in The Half Breed or The Thief of Bagdad, he has a stupendous physique. This was not accident and it was not vanity. It was craft practiced with the same dedication a musician brings to his instrument. Fairbanks understood something that most of his contemporaries missed entirely — that the camera cannot be deceived. A soft man in a hero's costume

reads as costume. The heroism had to live in the body itself, had to be there before the cameras rolled and the costumes went on, had to be as real as the sets were fake.

His athleticism was genuine — he could do handsprings, swing from ropes, and leap from rooftops. His acrobatics, done with a broad smile, were instant crowd pleasers. And the smile mattered as much as the athleticism. There were other strong men in early Hollywood. There was only one man who made extraordinary physical feats look like the most natural and enjoyable thing in the world. That ease, that grin, that suggestion that the whole enterprise was simply the best fun available to a man on a given afternoon — that was uniquely Fairbanks and it was entirely genuine.

THE SWASHBUCKLERS

By 1920 Fairbanks had completed twenty nine films which showcased his ebullient screen persona and athletic ability. He then had the inspiration of staging a new type of adventure costume picture, a genre that was then out of favor with the public. In The Mark of Zorro, Fairbanks combined his appealing screen persona with the new adventurous costume element. It was a smash success and parlayed the actor into the rank of superstar.

The Mark of Zorro changed everything. Fairbanks was thirty seven years old, an age at which most men of his era were settling into middle age. He responded by inventing a new genre and placing himself at its center. What followed was the greatest sustained run of adventure filmmaking the silent era would produce.

The Three Musketeers in 1921, Robin Hood in 1922, produced at a scale that stunned the industry and set a standard for cinematic spectacle that would not be surpassed for decades. The Thief of Bagdad in 1924, a production of such imagination and ambition that it remains astonishing to watch a century later. The Black Pirate in 1926, shot in early two strip Technicolor, Fairbanks again ahead of the industry, again setting the standard, Don Q, Son of Zorro in 1925 and the Gaucho in 1927.

Fairbanks spared no expense and effort in these films, which established the standard for all future swashbuckling films. He was not merely starring in them. He was producing them, controlling them, insisting on the quality of the sets and costumes and stunts, performing those stunts himself with the same cheerful disregard for consequence that had characterized everything he did since boyhood. The man who had converted his father's abandonment into athletic vigor was now converting that same energy into the greatest popular entertainment of his generation.

PICKFAIR AND THE EMPIRE

In 1919 Fairbanks did something that changed Hollywood permanently. Together with Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, and D.W. Griffith he founded United Artists, a studio owned and operated by the artists themselves. The idea was radical. The execution was audacious. The message to the industry was simple and unmistakable. These people understood their own value and were not going to be managed.

He had met Mary Pickford, then the most famous woman in the world, some years earlier. Both were married to other people.

Both understood that what existed between them was not going away. Concerned that infidelity or divorce would ruin their careers, they tried to hide their feelings and then their romance. They failed at hiding it, as people in that situation generally do, and the scandal they feared never materialized. The public, it turned out, wanted them together. They married in 1920.

Their home, Pickfair, became the social center of an industry and a culture. Kings visited. Presidents visited. Charlie Chaplin was a regular. The press invented the modern celebrity profile trying to keep up with them. They were the first couple of a new American aristocracy, one built not on bloodlines but on talent and work and the willingness to risk everything on one's own judgment.

Fairbanks also helped found the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and served as its first president. He hosted the first Academy Awards in 1929. He was not merely a star. He was an architect of the industry.

THE TALKIES AND THE DECLINE

Sound came to Hollywood in the late 1920s and it did not come kindly for everyone.

Douglas Fairbanks Jr. remembered that his father did not like talkies because he thought of his movie acting as a kind of ballet that could not be accomplished with early sound technology. This is exactly right and exactly the problem. What Fairbanks did on screen was physical poetry. It was movement and expression and the pure language of the body in action. Sound did not add to this. It reduced it, brought it back to earth, made it ordinary in a way that silence never had.

Nothing seemed to work for him in sound pictures. He tried musicals. He tried comedies. He made a travelogue. His last film, The Private Life of Don Juan in 1934, directed by Alexander Korda in England, was not what anyone had hoped. He retired from acting in 1936.

The marriage to Pickford ended in divorce that same year, the two great pillars of old Hollywood parting ways as the industry they had helped build moved into a new era without them. He married again in 1936, a younger woman, Lady Sylvia Ashley, and spent his final years traveling, restless, a man whose instrument had been taken from him by time and technology and who had not yet found another.

THE SON

Douglas Fairbanks Jr. was born in 1909 to Fairbanks and his first wife Anna Beth Sully, and the relationship between father and son was complicated by distance and by the enormous shadow the father cast. Fairbanks Jr. proved a gifted boy early in life, a multi-talented, hyperactive man, not content to limit himself. Handsome, distinguished and extremely bright, he excelled at sports, much like his father.

The son carved his own path, deliberately avoiding direct imitation of the father. He served with distinction in the Navy during World War II, received an honorary knighthood from the British crown, and built a career that stood entirely on its own merits. That he felt the need to distinguish himself so carefully from the father tells you something about the scale of what Fairbanks Sr. had built.

THE END

Douglas Fairbanks died on December 12, 1939, in Santa Monica, California. He was fifty six years old. The heart that had powered those extraordinary gymnastics, those rooftop leaps, those chandelier swings, simply gave out.

He became the first posthumous recipient of an Academy Honorary Award a few months after his death at the 12th Academy Awards, bestowed to him for his legendary career achievements in the development of motion pictures as the Academy's first president. Charlie Chaplin, his old friend and partner, read the remembrance at the dedication of his tomb.

The boy from Denver who had been abandoned at five and converted that wound into irrepressible forward motion had built an industry, defined an art form, invented a genre, and given the world a version of masculine grace and joy that it had not seen before and has not quite seen since.

Every action hero who came after him, every man who has grinned while leaping from something, every performer who has insisted on doing his own stunts, every actor who understood that the camera cannot be deceived and the body had better be prepared, owes him a debt that is rarely acknowledged.

We are acknowledging it now.

A MATTER OF RECORD

Fairbanks, Alaska and Douglas Fairbanks — Is There a Connection?

A reasonable man might assume that Fairbanks, Alaska, the state's second largest city, takes its name from the man who leaped across our silver screens with such magnificent abandon. A reasonable man would be wrong.

Fairbanks, Alaska was established in 1903 and named for Charles W. Fairbanks, a United States Senator from Indiana who would go on to serve as Vice President under Theodore Roosevelt beginning in 1905. Senator Fairbanks never visited the city that bears his name. History is full of such ironies.

Our Douglas Fairbanks was born Douglas Elton Thomas Ullman in Denver, Colorado in 1883. He took the Fairbanks name from his mother's first husband, John Fairbanks, after his own father abandoned the family when Douglas was five. The name was borrowed from one man and made immortal by another.

Senator Charles Fairbanks and Douglas Fairbanks share nothing but a name and the amusing coincidence that both achieved certain fame in roughly the same era. One governed. One leaped from balconies. History will remember both. It is not confused about which was more fun to watch.


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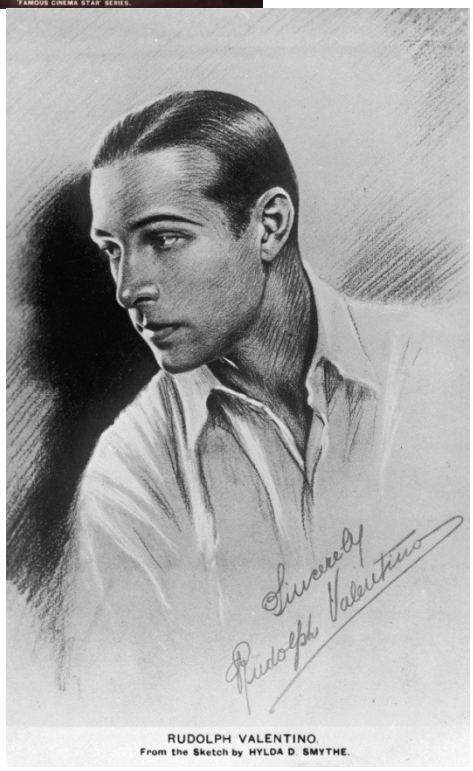
The Friendliest Fountain in Town!
ICE CREAM!
SODAS!
SUNDAES!
Stop in for a Tasty Treat!


RUDOLPH VALENTINO
IN "THE SON OF THE SHEIK".
FAMOUS CINEMA STAR SERIES.


Sincerely
Rudolph Valentino
RUDOLPH VALENTINO.
From the Sketch by HYLDA D. SMYTHE.

RUDOLPH VALENTINO

The Great Lover
1895 — 1926

He was born Rodolfo Pietro Filiberto Raffaello Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguolla on May 6, 1895, in Castellaneta, Italy. By the time America was finished with him he would be simply Valentino, one name sufficient, the way only the truly famous require only one name. He was thirty one years old when he died. In between he managed to become the most desired man in the world, the subject of riots and suicides and a grief so extravagant it embarrassed the nation that produced it.

When he was eleven his father, a veterinarian, died from malaria. The boy who would become the Great Lover grew up without a father, much like the boy from Denver who would become his great contemporary and friendly rival. Perhaps there is something in that. Perhaps men who have something to prove make better performers than men who do not.

He immigrated to the United States in 1913 and worked as a gardener, dishwasher, waiter, and taxi dancer before building a minor career as a vaudeville dancer. A taxi dancer was a man paid to dance with women who wanted a partner and were willing to pay for one. It was not a glamorous occupation. It was, however, an education in the desires of women, and Valentino proved to be an exceptionally attentive student.

He made his way to Hollywood in 1918, took his professional name, and began the slow work of finding his place in an industry that was not sure what to do with him. His dark exotic looks cast him repeatedly as a villain, a foreign threat, the dangerous other that American heroes were meant to defeat. He had other ideas.

His breakthrough came with The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in 1921, which popularized the Argentine tango with American audiences. The tango scene stopped the country cold. Here was something the screen had not shown before — a man who moved with a woman as though the two of them shared a single intention, dangerous and graceful simultaneously. Women left theaters shaken. Men left theaters uncertain about what they had just witnessed and slightly resentful of it.

His status as a sex symbol was cemented with The Sheik in 1921, which reportedly prompted women to faint in theater aisles. Blood and Sand followed in 1922. The films came quickly, the fame grew faster than anyone could manage, and the machinery of early Hollywood publicity did what it always did it simplified a complicated human being into a marketable image and sold that image as aggressively as the traffic would bear.

The personal life was genuinely complicated. His first marriage was to actress Jean Acker, a lesbian involved in a love triangle with powerful actresses, who left him on their wedding night. His second marriage, to the artistically ambitious Natacha Rambova, was more substantive but ultimately destructive. Rambova was accused of being controlling and was largely blamed for Valentino's appearance in several poorly received films. She was eventually banned from his sets. They divorced in 1925.

Throughout his career the press questioned his masculinity with a persistence that was both unfair and revealing. The Chicago Tribune accused him of promoting effeminacy in American men. Valentino challenged the article's writer to a boxing match to prove his masculinity, but the challenge went unanswered. Another writer for the paper entered the ring on behalf of the unnamed author, and Valentino defeated him. The man they called effeminate could fight. The irony was apparently lost on the Tribune.

Charlie Chaplin summarized Valentino the man versus the superstar as deftly as anyone: "He wore his success gracefully, appearing almost subdued by it. He was intelligent, quiet and without vanity." Chaplin observed that no man had greater attraction for women than Valentino, and no man was more deceived by them.

His final film, The Son of the Sheik in 1926, was his best work, a return to the persona that had made him and a performance of genuine authority and complexity. He did not live to see it succeed. Shortly after the premiere, the thirty one year old Valentino died suddenly from peritonitis after a ruptured ulcer. His death caused worldwide hysteria, several suicides, and riots at his lying in state, which attracted a crowd that stretched for eleven blocks.

At the time of his death he was severely in debt, and his heirs could not afford a burial plot for him. The Great Lover, the man whose image had sold millions of tickets and made fortunes for studios and distributors, died owing more than he owned. A friend provided a crypt. The Depression ended whatever memorial plans had been made. He remains there still.

Each year on the anniversary of his death, a mysterious Lady in Black appeared at his tomb and left a single red rose. She came for decades. Nobody ever quite agreed on who she was. It is the kind of ending Valentino himself might have written — romantic, unresolved, and slightly melancholy, which is to say, entirely true to the man.

We see you, Rudolph. The rose is on the tomb. It always will be.

RAMON NOVARRO

Ravishing Ramon
1899 — 1968

We See You

He was born Ramón Gil Samaniego on February 6, 1899, in Durango, Mexico, into a family of thirteen children on an estate they called the Garden of Eden. The name carries its own irony now, looking back at a life that contained such beauty and such darkness in equal measure. He was a second cousin of the actress Dolores del Río. The family had taste, standing, and a talent for the dramatic that ran in the blood.

The family escaped the Mexican Revolution by fleeing to Los Angeles when he was a teenager. He arrived in America with nothing but that good face and the talent behind it, and he went to work. He washed dishes. He danced for hire. He took whatever the city offered and made use of it with the patience of a man who understood that the destination was worth the distance.

His friends, actor and director Rex Ingram and his wife actress Alice Terry, began to promote him as a rival to Rudolph

Valentino. Hollywood in the early 1920s was hungry for exactly what Novarro offered — dark eyes, classical features, a physical grace that read differently from Fairbanks' all-American athleticism or Valentino's dangerous smolder. Novarro was something gentler and perhaps more complicated, beautiful without threat. romantic without menace.

He first came to wide attention in The Prisoner of Zenda in 1922, then Scaramouche in 1923, and then came the role that made him immortal. The 1925 silent film Ben-Hur made Novarro, known as Ravishing Ramon, one of Hollywood's most beloved silent film idols. The chariot race alone was worth the price of admission ten times over. His Ben-Hur was a performance of genuine physical and emotional power, and the film became one of the great productions of the silent era. Charlton Heston would play the same role thirty years later. He would not surpass it.

At the peak of his success in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Novarro was earning more than one hundred thousand dollars per film. He worked with Greta Garbo, Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, and Myrna Loy. He was a major star at a major studio and he conducted himself with the quiet dignity of a man who understood exactly how far he had come from Durango.

Underneath all of it, the internal accounting never balanced. Novarro was troubled all his life by his conflicted feelings toward his Roman Catholic faith and his homosexuality. His lifelong alcoholism is often traced to these problems. Here was a man celebrated as the great romantic ideal, desired by millions of women, and unable to live honestly within the life the industry had built around him. The distance between the man on screen and the man inside must have been considerable and exhausting to maintain.

Some speculate his departure from MGM was due to the open secret of his homosexuality and his refusal to enter a marriage of convenience to end the rumors. The talkies had already complicated his career. Losing the studio removed whatever protection remained. He continued working, in smaller films, in supporting roles, in television appearances on Dr. Kildare and Bonanza, but the great days of Ben-Hur and Mata Hari were behind him.

He was sixty nine years old on the night of October 30, 1968. He was bludgeoned to death in his North Hollywood home when a sexual tryst turned into a failed robbery. Two brothers had heard, incorrectly, that he kept a large sum of money hidden somewhere in the house. They tortured the actor to uncover its whereabouts. Novarro assured them there was no such money, leading to a prolonged beating. The brothers left with just twenty dollars.

One brother was beaten to death in prison. The other died by suicide.

Novarro is buried at Calvary Cemetery in East Los Angeles. His star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame is at 6350 Hollywood Boulevard. He deserves to be remembered for what he built, not for how it ended.

Hollywood's first Latino superstar,Ben-Hur before Heston, A man who carried an impossible weight with as much grace as any man could manage and who paid a price no man should have to pay.

We see you, Ramon. The Garden of Eden was real, whatever came after.

FRANCIS X. BUSHMAN

The Handsomest Man in the World
1883 — 1966

Francis Xavier Bushman was born on January 10, 1883, in Baltimore, Maryland, and in his heyday was advertised as the Handsomest Man in the World. This was not false advertising. The man was built like a Greek statue that had decided to go into the entertainment business, and the entertainment business was very glad he did.

As a young man he joined the Maryland Athletic Club and began a bodybuilding regimen that would give him his famous film physique. He cited Eugen Sandow as one of his bodybuilding influences. Sandow was the great physical culturist of the Victorian era, the man who essentially invented the modern idea of the trained male body as something to be admired and aspired to. Bushman took that gospel seriously and built himself accordingly. He then went to New York and worked as a sculptor's model, which tells you everything about what the finished product looked like.

After appearing in theater, Bushman was hired by Essanay Studios in Chicago in 1911, launching his film career and stardom. Over the next five years he appeared generally as the leading man in over a hundred silent films for the studio. A hundred films in five years. The man worked. The camera loved what it found and he gave it plenty of opportunities to confirm its opinion.

From 1914 to 1917 Bushman was America's most popular leading man. He received over 17,000 marriage proposals from amorous female fans by his own cheerful accounting. He drove around Hollywood in a touring car with his name embossed on the sides. He was not a modest man, but he had earned the right not to be.

The studio had a secret they were keeping on his behalf. The studio's publicity department kept secret his marriage from his fans, who sent him thousands of letters including marriage proposals. He had married in 1902, had five children, and was by all accounts a devoted father. None of this fit the image of the available romantic ideal the studio was selling, so none of it was mentioned. This arrangement held until it didn't.

In 1918 he was the subject of a national scandal as his affair with longtime costar Beverly Bayne became public. Three days after his divorce was final, Bushman and Bayne were married. The fans who had sent those proposals felt betrayed. The studio, which had engineered the secrecy in the first place, acted shocked. His contract was not renewed. He was effectively blacklisted across the industry.

He came back. In 1925 Bushman staged a spectacular comeback as Messala in MGM's Ben-Hur. Sharing the screen with Ramon Novarro's title character, Bushman played the villain with a relish that the role demanded and that the actor clearly enjoyed. When Ben-Hur was remade in 1959, Charlton Heston had to learn the chariot driving technique and quipped that the only man in Hollywood who could drive a chariot was Francis X. Bushman, and he was too old.

The comeback did not last. Within two years he was blacklisted again, allegedly because he had offended Louis B. Mayer. When his six million dollar fortune was wiped out by the 1929 Wall Street crash, Bushman virtually had to start over.

He did start over. That is the thing about Francis X. Bushman that deserves more attention than his physique or his scandals. The man simply refused to be defeated. He returned to the stage. He appeared in radio, eventually acting in some 2,500 programs. He did television. He kept working, kept showing up, kept introducing himself to whatever audience was available with that same unembarrassed confidence.

His headstone reads King of the Movies. He had that engraved himself. It is accurate. And it is the kind of thing only a man entirely comfortable with his own legend would do.

He died on August 23, 1966, in Pacific Palisades, California. He was eighty three years old. He died exactly forty years to the day after Rudolph Valentino. History has its own sense of symmetry

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BUSTER CRABBE

The Man from the Water
1908 — 1983

Clarence Linden Crabbe II was born on February 7, 1908, in Oakland, California. His family moved to Hawaii during his early childhood, and he grew up on the islands, graduating from Punahou School in Honolulu before attending the University of Southern California. He learned to swim as a boy and never really stopped. The water was where Buster Crabbe made sense, and the water is where his story begins.

At USC he became the school's first All-American swimmer in 1931 and a NCAA freestyle titlist. He was also setting records at a rate that suggested the sport's existing standards were simply insufficient for what he was capable of. By the end of his swimming career he had set sixteen world records and thirty five national records. These are not the numbers of a man who happened to be fast in the water. These are the numbers of a man who belonged there in a way most people never belong anywhere.

At the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam he won a bronze medal in the 1,500 meter freestyle. Four years later at the 1932 Los Angeles Games, everything changed. He won the gold medal in the 400 meter freestyle event, beating Jean Taris of France by one tenth of a second. As Crabbe himself put it: my life was entirely changed because of one tenth of a second. Nothing was ever the same again.

He was not wrong. Producers at Paramount Studios had been conducting screen tests at the 1932 Olympics, hoping to find an athlete they could turn into a Hollywood star, as their counterparts at MGM had done with Johnny Weissmuller. Impressed by Crabbe's looks and his medal, they offered him a contract. Crabbe decided to forgo a career in law to take it. One tenth of a second. Law school's loss was Hollywood's considerable gain.

The studio positioned him as a rival to Weissmuller, placing him in jungle pictures and athletic adventure roles. He played

Tarzan once, in 1933. He played a series of jungle man variations. He was reliable, physical, convincing on screen, and the camera responded to him the way it always responds to men who have actually done something with their bodies rather than merely pretending to.

Then came Flash Gordon. Crabbe thought the idea was too far out for movie audiences and would be a box office flop. He went to the tryouts out of curiosity, stood in the back of the room watching the testing, and the producer spotted him, came over, and offered him the role on the spot. Flash Gordon in 1936 was a phenomenon. Buck Rogers followed in 1939. Buster Crabbe was the only actor who played all three of the most popular iconic characters of the era — Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, and Tarzan. No one else has matched that particular trifecta before or since.

He kept working through the 1940s, appearing in westerns, serials, and adventure pictures at a pace that would have exhausted a less constitutionally sound man. He played Billy the Kid in a remarkable thirty six films. He made Army training films during the war. He appeared opposite Weissmuller in jungle pictures that had the quality of two Olympic champions sharing a set with cheerful professionalism.

When Hollywood slowed down he moved to television, then to business. He owned a swimming pool company. He lectured. He stayed in the water. In 1971, at the age of sixty three, he set a world record in his age group for the 400 meter freestyle. The man who had won Olympic gold forty years earlier was still finding new ways to be faster than everyone else his age. This is not a metaphor. It is simply what Buster Crabbe did.

He died on April 23, 1983, in Scottsdale, Arizona, of a heart attack. He was seventy five years old and had been working, swimming, and staying useful until very nearly the end.

One tenth of a second. What a thing to hang a life on. What a life it turned out to be.

THURL RAVENSCROFT

The Voice of Mid-Century America
1914 — 2005

Close your eyes and summon the voice of American masculinity from the mid-twentieth century. Not the tough-guy snarl of Bogart or the smooth patter of Sinatra, but something deeper, warmer, more elemental. The voice that sold you breakfast cereal on Saturday mornings, the voice that warned the Grinch about his heart problem. He was the voice that sang from the Haunted Mansion's graveyard and dubbed over handsome actors who couldn't carry a tune.

That voice belonged to Thurl Arthur Ravenscroft, and for over six decades it was everywhere in American life radio, television, film, theme parks, commercials even though most people never knew his name. He was the most famous unknown voice in entertainment history, a true bass whose warm rumble became synonymous with authority, trustworthiness, and unpretentious American manhood.

Ravenscroft didn't play characters so much as he embodied an entire cultural ideal. When his voice emerged from your radio or television, you believed what it told you. You trusted it. You felt reassured by it. This wasn't manipulation or salesmanship. It was the genuine article. The voice matched the man, and the man was exactly what mid-century America wanted to believe about itself: hardworking, decent, reliable, optimistic, and absolutely solid.

NEBRASKA ROOTS

Thurl Arthur Ravenscroft was born February 6, 1914, in Norfolk, Nebraska, a railroad town on the northern plains. His parents were farmers, and young Thurl grew up doing the hard physical work that shaped a generation of Midwestern men. The Great Plains in the 1920s didn't produce delicate sensibilities, boys learned early about responsibility, endurance, and keeping your word.

But Ravenscroft also grew up singing. His family was musical, and the church and community gatherings that structured small-town life all involved group singing. This was an era when ordinary people made their own music rather than passively consuming it. Ravenscroft discovered early that he had an unusually deep voice, even as a teenager, and that he loved using it.

He attended Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles on a football scholarship in the early 1930s — he was a big man, six feet tall and athletic — but the Depression had other plans. Money was scarce. Professional football wasn't yet the lucrative career it would become. Ravenscroft needed work, and his voice was the most marketable skill he possessed.

Radio was exploding across America in the 1930s, and Los Angeles was becoming a production center. Ravenscroft started doing radio work while still in school, discovering that his bass voice had a quality microphones loved. It was resonant without being boomy, powerful without being harsh, clear without being thin. In an era when audio fidelity was limited and every voice had to project through crackling speakers into living rooms, Ravenscroft's voice cut through perfectly.

He also joined a barbershop quartet called the Mellomen in the late 1930s, which would become one of the most successful vocal groups in Hollywood history. The Mellomen sang backup for everyone — Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, Elvis Presley, dozens of film soundtracks. But it was Ravenscroft's solo bass voice that would make him indispensable.

THE CRAFT BEHIND THE VOICE

To appreciate Ravenscroft's achievement, you need to understand what a true bass voice actually is and how rare it has always been.

The human voice exists on a spectrum. Most men are baritones, comfortable in a middle range. Tenors sit higher, with brightness and carrying power in their upper register. True basses are uncommon, probably 10 to 15 percent of male singers, and basses with Ravenscroft's particular qualities are rarer still.

A bass voice isn't just about hitting low notes. It's about resonance, color, and the physical presence the voice creates. Ravenscroft's voice had what vocal pedagogues call ring, a particular harmonic richness that makes the sound feel three-dimensional. When he sang or spoke, you didn't just hear it. You almost felt it in your chest.

This quality came from decades of disciplined vocal technique. Ravenscroft understood breath support, how to use the diaphragm and intercostal muscles to create steady, controlled airflow that could sustain long phrases without strain. He understood placement, keeping the resonance forward in the mask of the face so the sound stayed clear and focused rather than getting muddy or swallowed. He understood how to color vowels to maximize warmth without sacrificing intelligibility.

Most importantly, he took care of his voice. Ravenscroft didn't smoke, rarely drank, stayed physically fit, and treated his vocal cords like the precision instruments they were. This discipline allowed him to work constantly for over sixty years without significant vocal deterioration. He was still performing in his eighties, still producing that same rich, powerful sound that had defined his career.

Modern voice actors often lack this classical training. They have grown up with digital recording technology that can fix pitch, add artificial resonance, and edit out flaws. Ravenscroft's generation had one or two takes to get it right, live to tape, no fixes. Your voice had to be professional quality naturally, not manufactured in post-production.

The Mellomen's barbershop background was crucial here. Barbershop quartet singing demands precise intonation, blend, and the ability to lock into complex harmonies without accompaniment. It is unforgiving of vocal flaws. This training gave Ravenscroft the musicianship and ear that made him not just a voice but a consummate professional.

THE INVISIBLE CAREER

Ravenscroft's peculiar fame, or lack thereof, defined his career from the beginning. He worked constantly, sometimes multiple sessions per day, but almost never received screen credit until late in his life.

In the 1940s and 1950s, voice actors were considered technical workers, not performers worthy of recognition. Studios didn't credit them. Advertising agencies didn't credit them. Even Disney, which employed Ravenscroft extensively, rarely acknowledged his contributions. The voice was just another production element, like sound effects or incidental music.

This anonymity didn't bother Ravenscroft. He had steady work, good pay, and the satisfaction of doing what he loved at the highest professional level. He wasn't driven by ego or the need for public recognition. The work itself was enough.

But the paradox was real: Ravenscroft's voice was arguably more famous than most movie stars of his era. More Americans heard his voice more frequently than they saw Clark Gable or heard Frank Sinatra. Children grew up with his voice as a daily presence. Yet virtually nobody knew his name.

The Disney work exemplified this. Ravenscroft voiced characters in dozens of films and theme park attractions, including the singing busts in the Haunted Mansion and roles in Alice in Wonderland, Lady and the Tramp, and 101 Dalmatians. Disney loved his voice because it never talked down to children or condescended. It treated them with respect and spoke to them directly.

TONY THE TIGER: FIFTY YEARS OF GR-R-REAT

In 1952, the Kellogg Company introduced a new cereal called Sugar Frosted Flakes. The marketing campaign featured an animated tiger character named Tony, and they needed a voice that would appeal to children while reassuring parents that this sugar-loaded breakfast cereal was somehow wholesome and appropriate.

They auditioned dozens of voice actors. They tested different approaches — comic voices, sophisticated voices, young voices, old voices. Nothing quite worked. Then Ravenscroft walked into the audition.

The script called for Tony to proclaim the cereal great. Ravenscroft delivered the line with his natural bass resonance, adding a slight roll to the R — They're Gr-r-reat! — that gave it just enough playfulness without being silly. The combination of deep masculine authority and genuine enthusiasm was perfect. Children would trust the tiger. Parents would trust the tiger. The voice sold health, energy, fun, and reliability all at once.

Ravenscroft became the voice of Tony the Tiger in 1952 and continued in the role for fifty-three years, until shortly before his death in 2005. Think about that longevity. Three generations of Americans grew up hearing the same voice sell them the same cereal. The character's appearance evolved over the decades — Tony got more athletic, more dynamic, more contemporary — but the voice remained constant.

That consistency was the point. In a rapidly changing America, through the Cold War, civil rights movement, Vietnam, Watergate, the Reagan years, the internet age, Tony the Tiger's voice never wavered. It represented stability, continuity, the trustworthy constants you could count on. Saturday morning cartoons might change, culture might shift, but Tony and Thurl would be there, reassuring you that some things remained good and simple and true.

Ravenscroft reportedly made very little money from the Tony the Tiger role initially — voice actors in the 1950s worked for session fees, not residuals — but the exposure led to countless other opportunities. By the 1960s and 1970s, he was one of the most sought-after voice actors in the business, commanding premium rates precisely because that voice was so distinctive and trusted.

The irony, of course, was that Kellogg's didn't credit him. For decades, children had no idea who voiced Tony the Tiger. It wasn't until the 1990s, when Ravenscroft was in his eighties, that Kellogg's finally began acknowledging him publicly. By then, he had been doing the voice for over forty years without recognition.

Ravenscroft never complained about this. When asked in interviews, he'd shrug it off with characteristic modesty. The work was the reward. The craft was its own satisfaction. Getting to use your voice professionally for half a century? That was the dream, not seeing your name in lights.

THE GRINCH'S SONG

If Tony the Tiger made Ravenscroft ubiquitous, You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch made him legendary among those who actually knew vocal craft.

Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas was adapted for television in 1966 by Chuck Jones and produced by MGM. Boris Karloff narrated and voiced the Grinch himself. But there was a song in the special, a character piece that needed to convey both humor and genuine menace, and Karloff, brilliant actor though he was, couldn't sing it convincingly.

They called Ravenscroft. He came in, looked at the lyrics, and delivered the entire song in essentially one take. The recording engineer asked if he wanted to try it again, maybe experiment with different approaches. Ravenscroft said no, it felt right, move on.

You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch sits in a sweet spot for bass voice — low enough to rumble and threaten, high enough to articulate clearly and add character colors. The song demands both vocal power and nuanced acting. Ravenscroft delivers perfect diction while adding a slight snarl to certain words, then shifts to almost conversational intimacy on the song's more absurdist lines. The performance is a masterclass in vocal characterization.

For decades, the special aired every Christmas season without crediting Ravenscroft. Most viewers assumed Karloff sang it himself. It wasn't until the late 1970s that Ravenscroft's contribution began to be acknowledged, and even then casually, almost as an afterthought.

The song has become a Christmas standard, covered by countless artists. Every version is measured against Ravenscroft's original, and none quite capture that same combination of menace and humor. Modern singers either push too hard into comedy or lean too heavily into darkness. Ravenscroft understood the balance instinctively.

STEWPOT AND THE DUBBING GAME

In 1958, 20th Century Fox released the film version of South Pacific. Ken Clark played Stewpot, one of the featured Seabees — tall, blonde, athletic, exactly what Hollywood

wanted in a sailor. But Clark couldn't sing well enough for the demanding musical requirements. They needed someone who could deliver the song's low bass lines with power and personality.

They called Ravenscroft. He dubbed Clark's singing voice, providing the deep foundation that anchored the ensemble number There Is Nothin' Like a Dame. On screen, you see Clark. In your ears, you hear Ravenscroft, the disconnect is invisible unless you know to look for it.

This was standard practice in Hollywood musicals. Marni Nixon dubbed Natalie Wood in West Side Story, Audrey Hepburn in My Fair Lady, and Deborah Kerr in The King and I. Bill Lee dubbed Christopher Plummer in The Sound of Music. Studios cast based on looks and star power, then brought in professional singers to make the performances work musically.

Ravenscroft dubbed singers in dozens of films throughout the 1950s and 1960s. What made him valuable for this work was his ability to match not just the pitch but the character. He studied the actor's delivery, their phrasing, their energy, and created a vocal performance that felt like a natural extension of what you saw on screen.

He was never credited for this work at the time. Ken Clark got the on-screen recognition. Ravenscroft got his session fee and moved on to the next job.

THE FAMILY MAN

Throughout his six-decade career, Ravenscroft maintained a stable, conventional personal life that perfectly embodied the mid-century masculine ideal he vocally represented.

He married Lurene Tuttle, a fellow voice actor, in 1946. They remained married until her death in 1986, forty years of partnership. They had five children together and raised them in Southern California while both parents worked constantly in the entertainment industry.

In an industry full of dysfunction, addiction, and broken marriages, this was almost radical. Ravenscroft's stability became part of his professional brand. Directors and producers knew they could count on him not just for vocal quality but for showing up on time, being prepared, working efficiently, and maintaining professionalism across decades.

He treated session musicians and studio janitors with the same respect he showed directors and stars. He signed autographs graciously on the rare occasions he was recognized in public. He answered fan mail personally well into his eighties.

This wasn't calculated image management. It was simply how he was raised. Nebraska farming families in the 1920s didn't have patience for pretension or self-importance. You did your work, you kept your word, you treated people fairly, you showed up when you said you would. Ravenscroft carried those values from Norfolk to Hollywood and never saw reason to abandon them.

THE LEGACY

Ravenscroft continued working into his eighties, finally retiring in the early 2000s. He died May 22, 2005, at age ninety-one,

having spent over sixty years as one of the most-heard voices in American culture.

His death marked the end of an era. The deep, warm, authoritative bass he represented has all but vanished from American media. Listen to contemporary commercials or animated films and you will hear smooth announcers, quirky characters, celebrity cameos, ironic tones, digitally processed sound. What you will not hear is that genuine, unaffected bass that simply told you something and expected you to trust it.

Ravenscroft received recognition late in life — Disney Legend status in 1995, public acknowledgment from Kellogg's, the admiration of everyone who understood what he had actually done. He remained modest and self-deprecating, genuinely puzzled that people cared. He'd just done his job, he'd say. Nothing special.

The thousands of hours of audio he left behind constitute an archive of mid-century American culture. They're Gr-r-reat has transcended advertising to become cultural DNA, a phrase that will outlive us all.

For a kid from Norfolk, Nebraska who just wanted to sing and make a living, that's not a bad legacy. Thurl Ravenscroft gave his voice to his country for six decades, asked for little recognition, maintained his integrity, raised a family, and did work he could be proud of.

He was, by any measure that matters, exactly what he spent his life telling America that breakfast cereal was.

He's Gr-r-reat.


NOGAZ
MOTOR COMPANY
"Built for the Open Road"
Here's the NEW '57
NOGAZ
Sports Car
5-Speed Precision Gearbox
True Rumble Seat
• White Wall Touring Tires
Performance Meets Style!
DRIVE TOMORROW – TODAY.

SECTION THREE

SPRING IN THE AIR

Of Sacred Days, Flowering Trees, and the Return of the Straw Boater

There is a particular quality to spring that no other season quite manages. It arrives not all at once but in increments — a warmer afternoon here, a crocus there, the first morning you step outside and realize the air has changed. It does not announce itself. It simply appears, and suddenly everything that was dormant is not.

In this section we observe the season's ceremonies — sacred and civic, solemn and lighthearted. Easter and Arbor Day. The hat returned to its proper place. The music that has always accompanied the longer days. And a man who wrote some of the most beautiful songs the American spring ever produced, and who carried his own quiet winter inside him all his life.

We see the season. We see them all.

EASTER

The Oldest Spring

There is a reason Easter falls in spring and not in winter. The early Church was wise enough to understand that the natural world and the sacred calendar ought to speak the same language. What the earth does in April — the return from dormancy, the push upward through cold soil, and the insistence of life against all reasonable expectation— is precisely what Easter asks us to contemplate. The timing is not coincidence. It is theology expressed in seasons.

The feast has deep roots that run older than Christianity itself. The name in English derives from older spring observances, and the eggs and the rabbits and the new clothes on Sunday morning carry traces of something ancient underneath the Christian meaning. This is not a scandal. It is simply how culture works — layer upon layer, each generation adding its own understanding to ceremonies older than memory.

For the practicing Christian the day is the center of everything. Good Friday first, the particular darkness of that afternoon, and then the silence of Holy Saturday, the Church holding its breath. Then the Easter Vigil, the oldest liturgy in Christendom, celebrated in darkness with a single flame passed from candle to candle until the whole church is alight. And finally Easter Sunday morning, which arrives the way spring itself arrives — not gradually but suddenly, all at once, the stone rolled away and everything changed.

THE EASTER TABLE

For those who observe it primarily as a family feast rather than a liturgical one, Easter carries its own sacred weight. The ham that has been soaking since Thursday. The deviled eggs arranged on the good china. The women of the family who have been cooking since before anyone else was awake, which is to say the women who make civilization possible and receive insufficient acknowledgment for doing so.

The children in their new clothes, briefly presentable before the egg hunt render them otherwise. The grandfather at the head of the table who says grace with a sincerity that quiets the room. The particular quality of Sunday afternoon light through windows that have been opened for the first time since October.

These are not small things. They are the architecture of family memory, the ceremonies that hold generations together across time. A man in his fifties who smells ham roasting on an April morning is briefly nine years old again, and that is not nothing. That is everything.

Easter asks very little of us practically and a great deal of us spiritually. It asks us to believe in renewal when the evidence for it is not yet conclusive. It asks us to trust the spring before the spring has fully arrived. This is, when you consider it, the central act of faith available to any man regardless of his particular theology.

Believe the crocus. It has never been wrong yet.

ARBOR DAY

Plant Something That Will Outlast You

On January 4, 1872, Julius Sterling Morton, a journalist and editor of a Nebraska newspaper and a great supporter of the environment with a healthy love of trees, proposed a tree planting holiday to the state board of Agriculture. The first Arbor Day was held on April 10, 1872. Estimates state that greater than one million trees were planted in Nebraska on that inaugural date.

One million trees. On the first try. This tells you something about what happens when an idea arrives at exactly the right moment for the people who need it.

Morton had moved to Nebraska in 1854 with his wife Caroline, into a landscape that was largely treeless prairie. He understood immediately what was missing and spent the rest of his life doing something about it. The name itself was nearly different — the event was originally going to be called Sylvan Day in reference to forest trees, but Morton convinced everyone that Arbor Day better reflected the appreciation of all trees, forest and fruit alike. A small distinction that turned out to matter. Arbor Day sounds like something worth observing. Sylvan Day sounds like a minor deity.

By 1882 schools across the country had started to participate. Arbor Day became an official state holiday in Nebraska in 1885, with April 22 chosen to honor Morton's birthday. Within twenty years the holiday was celebrated in every American state except Delaware. Delaware eventually came around.

President Theodore Roosevelt issued an Arbor Day Proclamation to the School Children of the United States in 1907, telling them: "It is well that you should celebrate your Arbor Day thoughtfully, for within your lifetimes the Nation's need of trees will become serious." Roosevelt was right, as he generally was about the natural world, and said so a full sixty years before anyone coined the phrase environmental movement.

The Earth Day Connection

Here is where it gets interesting. The very first Earth Day was actually celebrated on Arbor Day. Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin settled on April 22 because he wanted to garner the attention of college students active in anti-war movements. End of April was ideal since students would not be preoccupied by spring break or final exams. But Nelson may also have been drawn to the date because of Arbor Day — with people in many states already planning to honor nature on that day, his movement would find a ready audience.

Earth Day is about a century younger than Arbor Day, first celebrated in the United States on April 22, 1970. The publication of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring in 1962 is often credited with creating awareness and bringing the environmental movement to the forefront.

The two holidays are distinct in character. Arbor Day is quiet and particular — a man, a tree, a hole in the ground, a future he will not live to see fully. Earth Day is broader, louder, more political. One is a private act of faith. The other is a public declaration of concern. Both are necessary. Both point in the same direction.

The Philosophy of the Tree

Planting a tree is one of the most optimistic acts available to an ordinary man. You will not sit in its shade. Your grandchildren might. You plant it anyway, which says something worth saying about how a man ought to move through the world — with some portion of his attention on what comes after him rather than only on what he needs today.

Morton understood this. Roosevelt understood this. The million Nebraskans who showed up on April 10, 1872 with shovels understood this without needing it explained.

Find a tree this spring. Plant it somewhere it can stay. Say nothing about it to anyone. That is enough.

HAT SEASON

The Return of the Straw Boater

There is a moment in late April or early May when a man of sound judgment opens his closet, moves the felt hat to the back, and brings the straw forward. This is not a casual act. It is a declaration. Winter is over. The season has turned. A man's hat announces his relationship with the calendar, and the straw boater announces spring with the confidence of a man who has been waiting since October to say something.

The hat has a history worth knowing. The boater — flat brim, flat crown, grosgrain ribbon — arrived in American life in the 1880s and reached its peak in the early decades of the twentieth century. It was the hat of the barbershop quartet, the riverboat, the summer lawn party, the young man courting on a Sunday afternoon. It photographed beautifully. It sat on the head with an authority that suggested the wearer had his affairs in order.

Straw hats were not merely decorative. They were functional — lightweight, ventilated, suited to the heat of a proper American summer in a way that felt placed over animal fur simply is not. The gentleman who understood this transitioned with the seasons because the seasons demanded it and because a man who ignores what the seasons demand is a man not paying sufficient attention.

THE EASTER BONNET

No discussion of spring hats is complete without the Easter bonnet, which occupied an entirely different register from the boater but carried equal seasonal authority. The Easter Sunday hat was an event in itself. Women saved for it, planned for it, and wore it with the full understanding that the congregation would notice and that this was entirely appropriate.

The Easter Parade tradition, most famously associated with Fifth Avenue in New York City, was at its height in the early to mid twentieth century. Families dressed in their finest and walked after services, seeing and being seen, the women's hats competing in an entirely civilized and thoroughly enjoyable fashion. Irving Berlin understood what he was celebrating when he wrote about it. The song endures because the tradition it described was genuine and worth preserving in memory.

THE GENTLEMAN'S SEASONAL WARDROBE

The hat transition was part of a larger seasonal shift in a gentleman's wardrobe that the mid century American male understood instinctively. The wool overcoat gave way to the lighter topcoat. The dark suit gave way to the lighter weight. White bucks emerged from wherever white bucks spend the winter. The whole wardrobe breathed out, loosened, turned toward the sun.

This seasonal attentiveness to dress was not vanity. It was a form of respect — for the occasion, for the people around you, for the effort that civilization requires to maintain itself. A man who dresses appropriately to the season signals that he is paying attention,

that he understands context, that he considers how he presents himself in the world worth considering.

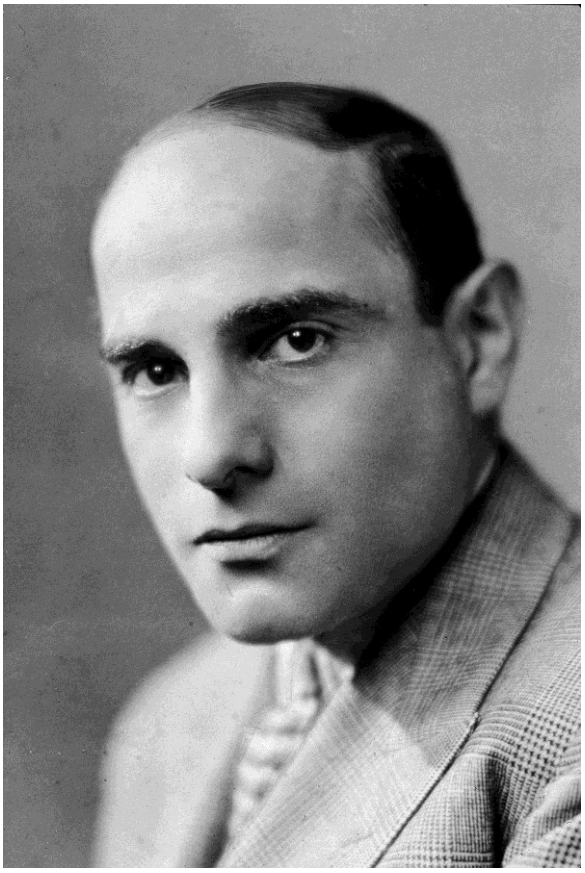
The man in the straw boater on a May afternoon, walking at a measured pace, nodding to his neighbors — he is not trying to impress anyone. He simply knows what the day requires and has provided it.

There is a lesson in that, quietly offered, easily missed, worth catching.

A NOTE ON SEERSUCKER

No spring wardrobe discussion is complete without at least a sentence on seersucker — the cotton fabric of puckered stripes, typically blue and white, that announces southern summer with the authority of a brass band. Seersucker Sunday, observed in the United States Senate as late as the early 2000s, was the day senators traditionally switched to their summer suits. That it had to be officially discontinued tells you something about how far we have drifted from the kind of seasonal attentiveness that once came naturally.

Bring back the seersucker. Bring back the boater. The calendar is still turning. A man might as well look like he noticed.



LORENZ HART

The Man Who Wrote Spring
1895 — 1943

We See You

Lorenz Milton Hart was born on May 2, 1895, in Harlem, New York City, the son of German Jewish immigrants who gave him a household full of music, literature, and the particular energy of people who had come to America with something to prove. On his mother's side he was a descendant of the Romantic poet Heinrich Heine. The lyric gift ran in the blood before he ever put pen to paper.

He was a small man, self-conscious about his appearance, carrying an inner life considerably larger and more complicated than the world around him generally had patience for. He went to Columbia University to study journalism, found the theater instead, and never looked back. In 1918, when he was twenty three, Hart met Richard Rodgers, then sixteen, and their partnership began. The age difference was considerable. What they built together was not.

Over their twenty five year collaboration Hart and Rodgers produced approximately one thousand songs. Blue Moon. My Funny Valentine. The Lady Is a Tramp. Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered. Manhattan. Isn't It Romantic. Falling in Love with Love. These are not merely popular songs. They are the architecture of American romantic longing, the soundtrack of a generation learning what it meant to feel things in a modern city.

According to music critic Stephen Holden, many of Hart's ballad lyrics conveyed a heart-stopping sadness that reflected his conviction that he was physically too unattractive to be lovable. In his lyrics, as in his life, Hart stands as a compellingly lonely figure. Although he wrote dozens of songs that are playful, funny and filled with clever wordplay, it is the rueful vulnerability beneath their surface that lends them a singular poignancy.

Read that carefully. The man who wrote My Funny Valentine — perhaps the most tender love song in the American canon — wrote it from a place of genuine personal ache. The songs were not performances of emotion. They were the real thing, the only place he could put what he actually felt, dressed in wordplay and wit so that the audience could receive it without being overwhelmed.

This is what great lyric writing does. It disguises autobiography as universality and then hands it to strangers who recognize themselves in it immediately.

Underneath the songs, underneath the wit and the parties and the brilliant company, was a man who could not reconcile who he was with the world he lived in. Hart's alcoholism, short stature, and repressed guilt about his homosexuality led to increasing problems in his collaboration with Rodgers. He disappeared for weeks at a time. He missed rehearsals. He arrived drunk to opening nights. Rodgers described him as a partner, a best friend, and a source of permanent irritation. The irritation was real. So was everything else.

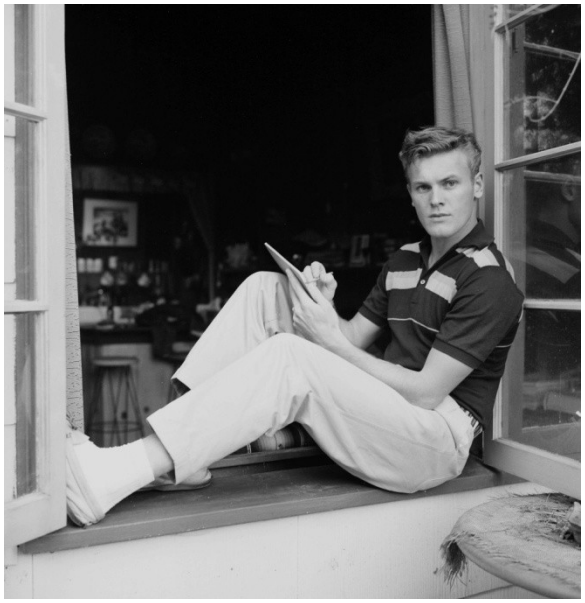
Rodgers eventually decided that he and Hart should reunite for a revival of A Connecticut Yankee in 1943. Hart showed up drunk to opening night in the audience. He was found ill shortly after and taken to the hospital. He developed pneumonia and fell into a coma the following day. He never saw the critical

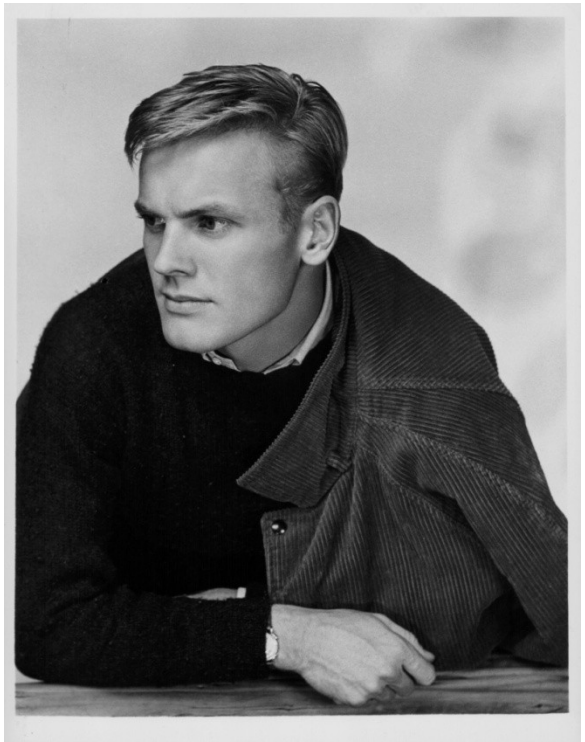
and commercial success of his final work. He died on November 22, 1943. He was forty eight years old.

The songs remain. They will remain long after everything else about his era has faded. When someone sits at a piano on a spring evening and plays My Funny Valentine the room goes quiet in a particular way, the way rooms go quiet when something true is being said.

That is Lorenz Hart, still in the room, still telling the truth.

We see you, Larry. The songs always gave you away.





TAB HUNTER

The All-American Boy Who Couldn't Be Himself

1931 — 2018

In 1957, a blonde, blue-eyed twenty-five-year-old stood at the absolute peak of American popular culture. His face sold millions of teen magazines. His voice topped the music charts with Young Love, holding the number one position for six weeks and becoming one of the year's biggest hits. His films drew crowds of screaming teenagers. Studio publicity departments worked overtime arranging his dates with starlets, feeding gossip columns stories about his romances, and carefully constructing an image of wholesome, all-American masculinity.

Tab Hunter was everything 1950s America wanted its young men to be: handsome, athletic, clean-cut, polite, ambitious, and appropriately interested in women. Girls wanted to date him. Boys wanted to be him. Parents approved of him. He was safe, unthreatening, the boy next door scaled up to movie-star proportions.

It was all performance. Every arranged date, every magazine cover story, every carefully managed public appearance was designed to hide a simple truth: Tab Hunter was gay, terrified of exposure, and living a double life that would have destroyed his career instantly if revealed.

Tab Hunter's real name was Arthur Andrew Kelm. He spent the height of his fame navigating an impossible situation. The studio system that made him rich and famous also imprisoned him, demanding he maintain an elaborate fiction while threatening to discard him the moment that fiction cracked. The same magazines that proclaimed him America's heartthrob would have destroyed him gleefully if they had discovered the truth. The fans who loved him loved an invention, not a person.

Hunter survived this machinery, outlived the studio system that controlled him, and eventually fifty years after his peak fame told his story honestly in his autobiography Tab Hunter Confidential in 2005 and the acclaimed documentary of the same name in 2015. His life offers a window into the specific cruelties of the 1950s closet and the extraordinary psychological costs of living as two completely different people simultaneously.

ARTHUR ANDREW KELM

Tab Hunter was born Arthur Andrew Kelm on July 11, 1931, in New York City. His childhood was unstable and marked by his parents' difficult marriage and eventual divorce. His father was abusive; his mother, a German immigrant, struggled to raise Arthur and his older brother alone during the Depression.

The family moved to California when Arthur was young, settling eventually in the Los Angeles area. He was a good looking kid who grew into a strikingly handsome teenager, blonde, athletic, with classic features that seemed designed for the camera. But he was also shy, uncertain about himself, and increasingly aware that he was different from other boys in ways he could not safely acknowledge.

Arthur discovered his attraction to men during adolescence. In the 1940s, in Southern California, this was dangerous

knowledge. Homosexuality was criminal, classified as mental illness, grounds for arrest and social destruction. There was no gay rights movement, no visible gay community, no cultural framework for a teenage boy to understand these feelings as anything other than shameful and threatening.

He kept silent. He dated girls when expected. He played the part. But he also began to realize that his looks might be a path to something, not yet sure what, but something beyond the limited options available to a working-class kid from a broken home.

After high school, Arthur joined the Coast Guard, serving briefly before receiving a discharge. The circumstances of this discharge would haunt him later, with suggestions it was related to his sexuality, though details remained unclear. After military service, he worked odd jobs, stable hand, ice delivery, anything that paid. He loved horses and spent time around the Los Angeles equestrian scene. It was there, mucking stables and exercising horses, that he was discovered by agent Henry Willson in 1948.

THE INVENTION OF TAB HUNTER

Henry Willson was one of Hollywood's most successful and notorious talent agents. He specialized in discovering handsome young men, renaming them with punchy, masculine monikers, and selling them to studios as the next big thing. He had created Rock Hudson, renamed from Roy Fitzgerald. He had invented Guy Madison from Robert Moseley. Willson understood exactly what Hollywood wanted and how to package it.

When Willson saw seventeen-year-old Arthur Kelm exercising horses, he saw raw material for his factory. The kid was almost too good-looking, that face, that build, that natural athleticism. With the right name, the right coaching, the right studio promotion, this kid could be huge.

Arthur became Tab Hunter. The name was virile, memorable, unusual enough to stand out but not so exotic as to seem foreign or threatening. Tab Hunter sounded like an action hero, a romantic lead, an all-American guy.

Willson was also gay, and his stable of clients included numerous gay and bisexual actors whom he mentored, protected, and occasionally exploited. He understood the closet's machinery because he navigated it himself. He knew exactly how to construct a heterosexual public persona while enabling his clients to have private lives, as long as they remained absolutely discreet.

Warner Bros. signed Tab Hunter in 1952. The studio machinery immediately went to work constructing his image. Publicity departments wrote his biography, carefully edited to remove anything problematic. They arranged dates with starlets and made sure photographers captured him with beautiful women at premieres and nightclubs. They fed stories to fan magazines about his supposedly active romantic life.

Hunter learned quickly that he had no control over this process. The studio owned his image, his public identity, even his private time. When Warner Bros. said he was dating so-and-so, he dated her, or at least appeared to. When they told him to attend an event, he attended. When they needed him to play the wholesome boy next door, that is exactly what he did.

The alternative was unemployment. Actors who resisted studio control found themselves suspended, their contracts sold to lesser studios, their careers quietly strangled. Hunter watched it happen to others and understood the rules perfectly.

THE MANUFACTURED STAR

Tab Hunter's film career took off rapidly. Warner Bros. put him in Island of Desire in 1952 opposite Linda Darnell, The Steel Lady in 1953, and Track of the Cat in 1954. He was not initially a trained actor, his performances were wooden, his line readings stiff, but the camera loved him, and teenage girls loved him even more.

By 1955, he was a genuine star. Battle Cry, a World War II drama, showcased him effectively and became a major box office success. He had the looks, the studio support, and the fan base.

What made Hunter valuable was not his acting ability, though he improved significantly over time, but his image. He represented a particular ideal of American masculinity that the 1950s found deeply appealing: strong but gentle, handsome but wholesome, ambitious but humble. He seemed attainable, not like the remote sophistication of Cary Grant or the dangerous sexuality of Marlon Brando. Tab Hunter was the boy who might actually live next door, if your neighborhood was very, very lucky.

The irony was brutal. Millions of teenage girls fantasized about Tab Hunter while the man himself was attracted to men and forced to hide it completely. Even in private, paranoia was constant. You never knew who might talk, who might threaten exposure, who might decide your secret was valuable.

YOUNG LOVE AND PEAK FAME

In 1957, Tab Hunter recorded Young Love, a gentle ballad that became a phenomenon. The song hit number one on the Billboard charts, sold over a million copies, and cemented Hunter's status as a complete entertainment package. He could act, he could sing, he had the looks, and most importantly, America loved him.

The success was both triumph and torture. Every new achievement raised the stakes. The more famous he became, the more valuable his secret was to those who might discover it, the more catastrophic exposure would be. Success did not bring security. It multiplied the dangers.

Young Love is fascinating in retrospect precisely because of its innocence and yearning. The lyrics speak of pure, uncomplicated romantic desire, exactly the kind of sanitized emotion the 1950s preferred. Hunter sang it with genuine feeling, but the feelings he actually experienced could not be expressed in any song the culture would accept.

The performance became another layer of the performance. Tab Hunter singing about wholesome heterosexual romance while hiding his actual self. The audience heard what it wanted to hear. The truth remained invisible.

THE RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the surveillance and paranoia, Hunter had relationships. He could not avoid it. Human beings need intimacy, connection, love. The closet demanded celibacy or absolute discretion, and Hunter, like most people, chose discretion over isolation.

His first serious relationship was with ice skater Ronnie Robertson, an Olympic medalist and fellow closeted gay man. They met in the mid-1950s and began a relationship that lasted several years. Robertson understood the pressures Hunter faced because he navigated similar territory.

They had to be careful. They could not live together openly. They could not appear in public as a couple. They saw each other privately, in spaces where they felt relatively safe, always aware that discovery meant ruin for both of them.

Hunter's most famous relationship was with Anthony Perkins, who was becoming a star around the same time. Perkins was also gay, also closeted, also navigating the studio system's demands. They understood each other perfectly. Their relationship lasted on and off through the late 1950s. Perkins would later marry and have children, maintaining his closet until his death from AIDS in 1992, never publicly acknowledging his sexuality.

The tragedy of these relationships was their enforced secrecy and impermanence. Hunter and his partners could not build normal lives together, could not imagine futures, could not even safely acknowledge to most people that they were together. Every relationship existed in shadow, constantly threatened by exposure.

THE MACHINERY OF CONTROL

Warner Bros. and Henry Willson protected Tab Hunter's secret, but protection came with total control. The studio arranged dates with actresses including Natalie Wood, Debbie Reynolds, and Venetia Stevenson. These were not casual publicity stunts. They were elaborate performances designed to create believable romantic narratives.

Hunter would escort these women to premieres, parties, and restaurants where photographers waited. The pictures would appear in fan magazines with breathless speculation about imminent engagements. Gossip columnists like Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons would mention the couples approvingly.

But the protection had limits. In 1955, scandal magazine Confidential obtained information about a 1950 party Hunter had attended that was raided by police for homosexual activity. Hunter had been arrested, though charges were dropped. The studio managed to suppress the story temporarily by offering Confidential other celebrity scandals in exchange, but the threat remained constant.

This was the devil's bargain at the system's core. The studio would protect you from exposure as long as you were valuable and obedient. Step out of line, become difficult, or decline in popularity, and that protection might evaporate.

THE DECISION TO TELL THE TRUTH

In 2005, at age seventy three, Tab Hunter published Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star. The book told his story honestly, his sexuality, his relationships, the studio system's control, the fear, the double life, all of it.

The book was remarkably clear-eyed about the contradictions of his life. Hunter did not present himself as a hero or a victim but as a person who had done what he needed to survive in a system designed to destroy him if he stepped out of line. He acknowledged the studio system's protection even as he documented its control.

Tab Hunter Confidential became a bestseller and received widespread critical acclaim. The love stories, particularly his relationship with Anthony Perkins, moved readers by showing the human cost of systemic homophobia. Critics praised the book for its straightforward prose and lack of self-pity. Hunter did not dwell on grievances or score settle. He told his story, acknowledged complexity, and let readers draw their own conclusions.

The 2015 documentary of the same name interwove archival footage from Hunter's films and television appearances with contemporary interviews, creating a portrait that showed both the manufactured image and the reality beneath it. Hunter himself appears on camera at eighty three, relaxed and candid in ways he had never been allowed to be during his career. The young Tab Hunter was beautiful but tense, always performing. The old Tab Hunter was weathered but peaceful, finally able to speak freely.

THE LEGACY

Tab Hunter died July 8, 2018, three days before his eighty seventh birthday. His obituaries acknowledged his sexuality matter-of-factly, noting his long relationship with partner Allan Glaser and his decision to tell his story publicly. This straightforward acknowledgment would have been unimaginable during his peak fame.

The all-American boy who could not be himself eventually became the old man who could. Tab Hunter's journey from Arthur Kelm to manufactured star to honest witness captures an entire era's relationship with sexuality, celebrity, and the crushing weight of enforced dishonesty.

His story reminds us what it cost to survive those years, and why the truth matters more than the pretty lies we tell about the past.

We see you, Tab. You always deserved better than what they built around you.


STATE


Cool... Colorful... Delicious!
Perfect for parties, suppers, and summer evenings.
Serve a sparkling gelatin dessert and watch
smiles appear around the table.
Light, refreshing, and always welcome!

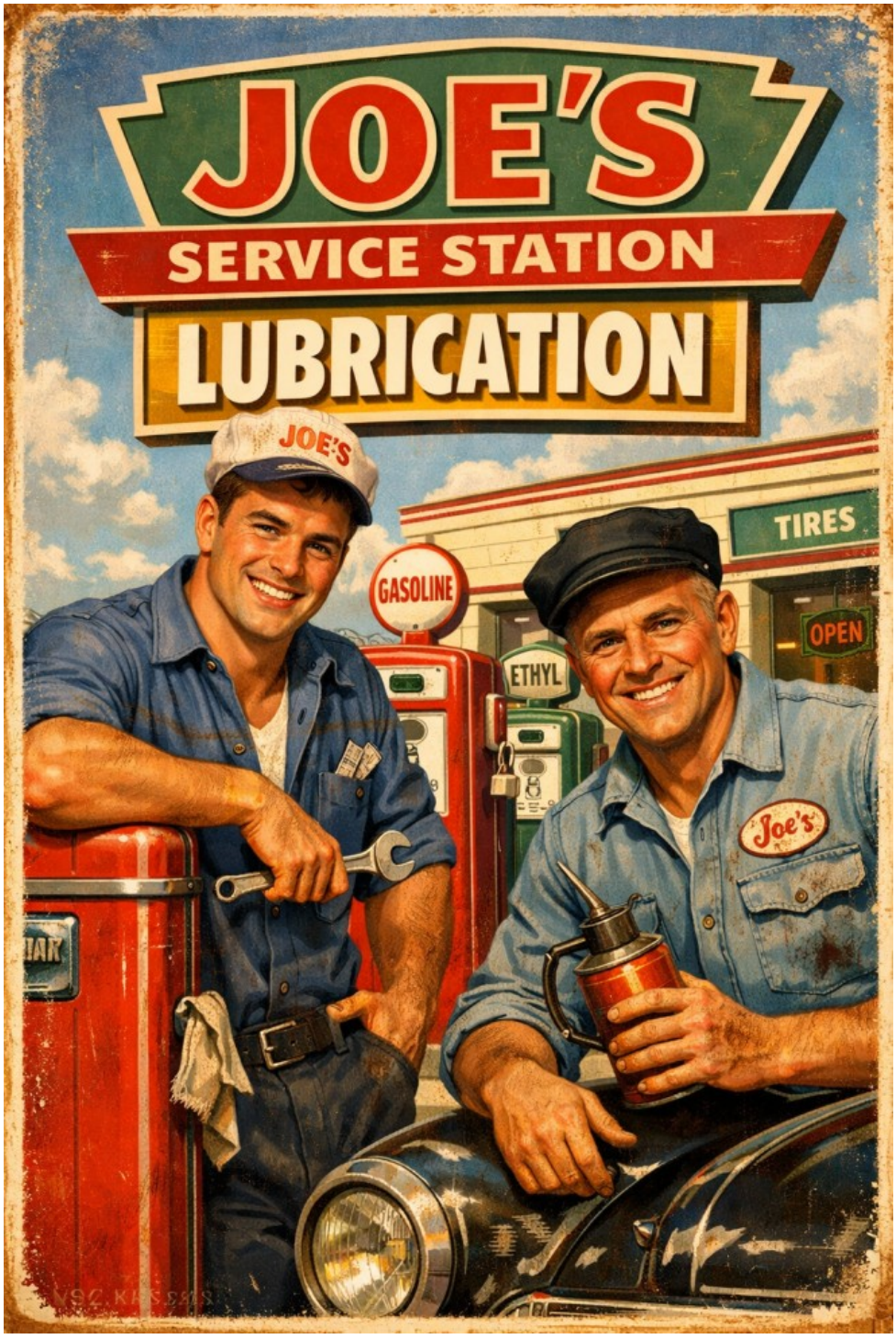
THE PROSECUTOR: Roy Cohn's Poisonous Legacy

Roy Cohn (1927-1986)

He embodied the most toxic possibilities of the 1950s closet. As chief counsel to Senator Joseph McCarthy from 1953 to 1954, Cohn orchestrated anti-Communist hearings that destroyed careers through innuendo and accusation. Simultaneously, he was instrumental in the Lavender Scare persecution of homosexuals in Government despite being gay himself.

Cohn's hypocrisy was breathtaking in its cruelty. He used his position to investigate, expose, and purge gay federal employees while carefully concealing his own sexuality. Men lost jobs, families, and futures because of Cohn's work, even as he maintained relationships with other men and frequented New York's gay social circles. The cognitive dissonance required to prosecute others for what you practice yourself suggests profound self-hatred weaponized into institutional violence. His most notorious collaboration was with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, himself rumored to be gay, in identifying and removing suspected homosexuals from sensitive positions. The two men maintained extensive files on gay government workers, coordinating with local police to conduct raids and build cases. Cohn helped establish the framework that would result in over 5,000 firings between 1947 and 1961.

After McCarthy's fall, Cohn reinvented himself as a New York power broker and attorney, representing mobsters, corrupt politicians, and ambitious businessmen. In the 1970s and 1980s, he mentored a young real estate developer named Donald Trump, teaching him his signature tactics: attack relentlessly, never admit weakness, and deny everything. Cohn contracted AIDS in the mid-1980s but publicly claimed he had liver cancer, maintaining his denial of homosexuality even while dying. He was disbarred shortly before his death in 1986 for unethical conduct. His life demonstrated what the closet's pressure could produce such a self loathing man.


JOE'S
SERVICE STATION
LUBRICATION
JOE'S
TIRES
GASOLINE
OPEN
ETHYL
Joe's

MAY

Rites of Passage and Remembrance

MOTHER'S DAY

There is a particular quality of light in a May kitchen on a Sunday morning. It comes through windows that have finally been opened after the long winter, carrying with it the smell of cut grass and the first warmth that actually means something. On the stove, something has been simmering since early morning. The good dishes are out. Someone has put flowers in a vase, likely lilacs, likely slightly crooked in the arrangement, likely perfect.

This is the domestic altar of May. The woman presiding over it has been the fixed point around which everything else in the household has revolved for as long as anyone can remember. She has packed the lunches and dressed the wounds and sat up through the fevers and been the first voice in the morning and the last light on at night. She has worried quietly about things she never named aloud. She has been glad in ways she expressed through cooking rather than speech.

Anna Jarvis lobbied for years to establish a national day of recognition for mothers, succeeding when President Woodrow Wilson signed the proclamation in 1914. Jarvis herself never married and had no children of her own. She spent the second half of her life in bitter opposition to what the holiday became, horrified by its commercialization, convinced that the greeting card industry had hijacked something meant to be intimate and private. She died in a sanitarium in 1948, broke, her eyesight gone, reportedly still dictating letters of protest.

She was right about the commercialization. She may have been wrong that it cannot survive it. The woman in the May kitchen does not need a Hallmark card to know what she means to the people sitting at her table. The flowers on the counter, the slightly crooked lilacs in the vase, say it better than any sentiment printed on glossy paper.

Tell her today. Tell her in person if you can. Write the letter if you cannot. Do not wait until the calendar insists.

PROM

There was a period in American life when a seventeen-year-old boy in a rented suit understood, perhaps for the first time, that certain occasions demanded his full attention and best behavior. The gymnasium was unrecognizable. Someone had spent three weeks turning fluorescent lights and folding tables into something approaching magic. The girls arrived in dresses that had been planned since February. The corsage in his pocket had been purchased at a florist where his hands shook slightly when he ordered it.

The prom was theater, and theater was not nothing. It was practice. It was the first formal negotiation between the person a young man actually was and the person an occasion required him to become. The handshake with her father at the door. The photograph in front of the fireplace. The borrowed car returned with a full tank of gas. These were not mere conventions. They were the apprenticeship of character.

What happened after, what was said and felt and remembered from that particular evening, belongs to those who were there. The gymnasium gets dismantled by Monday morning. The corsage dries and is kept in a drawer somewhere, or is not. What stays is harder to name and longer lasting than flowers.

WEDDINGS

June is the traditional month, and June will have its say. But brides have always known that May has something June does not, that particular combination of promise and fragrance and light that has not yet tipped into summer's certainty. The May wedding carries with it the sense that everything is still becoming. The lilacs are still blooming. The year is still young.

A wedding is the most audacious thing two people can do. They stand before witnesses and make promises about a future they cannot see, regarding a person they cannot yet fully know, in circumstances they cannot predict. The vows are spoken in the present tense but point toward decades. Something about that deserves the fragile perfection of May rather than the confident heat of July.

The good suit pressed. The flowers arranged by someone's aunt who has opinions about arrangements. The reception where old relatives who have not seen each other in years suddenly have everything to say. The couple at the center of it all, briefly suspended in a moment that everyone in the room understands will not come again.

What they are promising is not permanence so much as intention. They are saying: I will try. I will keep trying. I will be here when it is hard and when it is easy and when it is neither. That is enough. That is, in fact, everything.

DECORATION DAY

May does not end in celebration. It ends in remembrance.

The old name is better. Decoration Day. The image it carries is more honest than the federal holiday that replaced it: families moving through a cemetery in the last warmth of May, carrying flowers, finding the stones of the people they knew and the people they only knew of. Kneeling to pull weeds from around a marker. Placing a small flag that will fade by summer's end.

The tradition emerged from the Civil War's aftermath, from communities North and South who found themselves in possession of more grief than any established ritual could contain. The graves were everywhere. The losses were recent enough to be personal even when they were not. Women's groups began the practice almost simultaneously in multiple states, cutting flowers from their gardens and going out to decorate the graves of soldiers. They did not need to be organized. They did not need to be told. They knew.

The federal government eventually formalized it in 1971, moving it to the last Monday in May for the sake of a long weekend. The long weekend is pleasant. The meaning is older and quieter than any weekend.

The meaning is this: the names are real. The men who bore them were real. They had preferences about breakfast and opinions about weather and habits their families

found endearing or maddening. They were not symbols when they were alive. They should not become only symbols now that they are gone.

Say the names. Find the stones. Bring flowers if you have them. Stand quietly for a moment longer than feels comfortable. This is what Decoration Day asks. It is not a large ask. It is an essential one.

LEONARD MATLOVICH

Technical Sergeant,

United States Air Force 1943 — 1988

Leonard Matlovich served three tours in Vietnam. He was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. He was, by every measure the United States Air Force applied to its personnel, an exemplary airman, a decorated combat veteran, a man who had given what his country asked and then some.

In 1975 he wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Air Force. The letter began: *"After some years of uncertainty, I have arrived at the conclusion that my sexual preferences are homosexual as opposed to heterosexual."*

He knew what the letter would cost him. He sent it anyway.

The Air Force discharged him. He fought the discharge in court for years, eventually accepting a settlement in 1980 rather than face continued legal battle. He used the settlement money to open a pizza restaurant in San Francisco. He became an activist in the years that followed, one of the earliest and most visible faces of the movement for military service equality.

He was diagnosed with HIV in 1986. He died in June of 1988.

His gravestone in Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C., reads:

A Gay Vietnam Veteran

When I was in the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one.

There is nothing to add to that. There rarely is when a man has found exactly the right words for exactly the right thing.

We see you, Leonard. The medals were always earned. So was everything else.

ROCK HUDSON

The Perfect Illusion
1925 — 1985

There is a photograph taken in 1955 of Rock Hudson and Tab Hunter standing together at a Hollywood function, both in dark suits, both smiling the particular smile that men in their position learned to produce on demand. They were the two most photographed young men in America at that moment. The cameras loved them equally. The studios controlled them equally. The secret they shared was identical.

Roy Harold Scherer Jr. was born November 17, 1925, in Winnetka, Illinois, the son of a mechanic and a telephone operator whose marriage did not survive the Depression. His mother remarried a man named Wallace Fitzgerald, and Roy briefly became Roy Fitzgerald before the name was taken from him entirely by the same agent who had invented Tab Hunter.

Henry Willson saw Roy Fitzgerald pumping gas in 1947 and recognized the same raw material he always recognized: a face that could make women forget their own names and a build that suggested competence and safety simultaneously. Roy Fitzgerald became Rock Hudson, a name so aggressively masculine it was almost a parody of itself, which was precisely the point.

Universal Studios signed him. The machinery went to work. His biography was rewritten. His dates were arranged. His image was managed with the same careful attention to detail that a counterfeiter brings to a hundred dollar bill. Rock Hudson, America was informed, was looking for the right girl. Rock Hudson loved fast cars and outdoor sports. Rock Hudson was everything a young American man ought to be.

The homosexuality was known within the industry from the beginning. Willson knew. The studio knew. Directors knew. It was the most open secret in a town built on open secrets, and it was managed with the same pragmatic efficiency as everything else. You protected your investment. You kept the fiction intact. You arranged a marriage if the rumors got loud enough.

In 1955 the rumors got loud enough. Confidential magazine, which had been threatening to publish a story about Hudson's sexuality, was negotiating its silence. Willson brokered a deal: the magazine would spike the Hudson story in exchange for damaging material on two other clients Willson was willing to sacrifice. The transaction was completed. The story stayed buried.

Then Willson arranged a marriage. Hudson wed his secretary Phyllis Gates in 1955 in a ceremony that generated exactly the publicity it was designed to generate. The marriage lasted three years. Gates would later claim she had genuinely not known Hudson was gay. The studio's version of events suggested otherwise. The truth, as usual in these matters, dissolved somewhere between competing interests.

Hudson's film career reached its peak in the late 1950s. His comedies with Doris Day, Pillow Talk in 1959 and its sequels, were enormous box office successes that seemed designed to make the audience fall in love with him as a romantic leading man. The irony was visible only in retrospect. Here was a gay man playing elaborate heterosexual courtship games opposite America's most wholesome actress, and the audience found it entirely convincing. The

performance was that good. The machinery was that effective.

He transitioned to television in the 1970s with McMillan and Wife, working steadily through a decade that was changing the culture around him faster than Hollywood's old guard could process. The gay rights movement had emerged. The closet's walls were cracking. Hudson continued maintaining his public fiction while living more privately as himself, the halfway existence that men of his generation had learned as a survival skill and could not entirely unlearn.

In 1984 he appeared gaunt and visibly ill at a press conference with Doris Day. The photographs went around the world. Speculation was immediate. In July 1985, Rock Hudson became the first major American celebrity to announce publicly that he had AIDS.

The announcement changed things. It is not too much to say it changed everything. AIDS had been killing gay men for four years at that point, largely invisible to mainstream America, largely ignored by the government, largely framed as something happening to people who had made choices that decent citizens need not think about. Rock Hudson had a face that mainstream America recognized and loved. When that face appeared on the cover of every magazine in the country with the word AIDS beneath it, the abstraction became human.

He died October 2, 1985. He was fifty-nine years old.

The obituaries were kind, which was more than the era had been. His friend President Ronald Reagan, who had said nothing publicly about AIDS for four years while tens of thousands of Americans died, issued a statement of condolence. The disease that had been invisible to official Washington became, briefly, visible.

Rock Hudson spent his life performing a character named Rock Hudson for the benefit of an audience that never knew the performer's name. At the end, in the only way available to him, he told the truth. It cost him nothing further by then. It may have saved lives.

The machinery that built him also broke him. The fiction that made him famous also isolated him. He was, beneath the manufactured name and the arranged marriages and the carefully managed image, Roy Scherer from Winnetka, Illinois, a mechanic's son who wanted to act and learned too late that the price of the dream was himself.

We see you, Roy. You were always better than what they made you perform.


Stoppette
DEODORANT CREAM

MONTGOMERY CLIFT

The Method and the Wound

1920 — 1966

There is a before and an after in Montgomery Clift's life, and the dividing line is a telephone pole on Laurel Canyon Boulevard on the night of May 12, 1956. Before that night he was arguably the most gifted actor of his generation, the man who had made Marlon Brando possible, the face that combined masculine beauty with interior complexity in ways Hollywood had never quite seen. After that night he was all of those things still, but broken in ways that showed, and the industry that had adored him began the slow process of looking away.

Edward Montgomery Clift was born October 17, 1920, in Omaha, Nebraska, the son of a banker and a woman of consuming social ambition who believed her family had aristocratic Southern roots and organized her life around that belief. His mother Ethel dominated him completely. She dressed him and his twin sister identically as small children. She supervised his friendships, his education, his interior life with an attention that left little room for a self to develop independently.

He began acting professionally at fourteen, working in summer stock and eventually Broadway, where by his early twenties he was already being described as extraordinary. The stage gave him something his childhood had not: a space where the self could be explored rather than managed. He threw himself into it with an intensity that bordered on self-destruction even then.

Hollywood came calling after the war. His first two films, released in the same year, established him immediately as something new. In Red River in 1948 he held his own against John Wayne, which required genuine nerve. In The Search the same year he received his first Academy Award nomination. He was twenty-seven years old and already redefining what screen acting could be.

What Clift brought to the screen was the interior life made visible. Where the previous generation of leading men projected confidence and mastery, Clift projected uncertainty and feeling. You watched him think. You watched him feel things he hadn't decided whether to feel. This was partly the influence of the Actors Studio and the Method approach that was transforming American performance, but it was also simply who he was. The vulnerability on screen was not manufactured. It came from somewhere real and private and complicated.

What came from that same place was his sexuality. Clift was bisexual, attracted to both men and women, and navigated this in the particularly fraught environment of 1950s Hollywood with a combination of discretion and recklessness that suggests a man at war with himself. He had relationships with men, including a long and complicated involvement with the singer Libby Holman, a woman seventeen years his senior who had survived her own devastating scandal. He was linked romantically with women in the fan magazines. Neither story was complete.

The drinking began early and accelerated steadily. The pills followed. The self-medication of a man carrying more than he had been given tools to carry was visible to everyone around him and addressed by no

one effectively, partly because the era had no framework for it and partly because Clift resisted intervention with the same intensity he brought to everything else.

Then came the night on Laurel Canyon Boulevard. He had been at a dinner party at Elizabeth Taylor's house, left early, and drove his car into a telephone pole on the winding canyon road. Taylor reached him first, reportedly pulling a tooth from his throat to keep him from choking. The accident shattered his face. Reconstructive surgery rebuilt it, but not quite into what it had been. The photographs from before and after are difficult to look at side by side.

He continued working, suddenly in 1959, opposite Taylor again. Judgment at Nuremberg in 1961, for which he received another Academy Award nomination despite being on screen for fewer than fifteen minutes, a performance so concentrated and devastating that it remains one of the finest pieces of acting in American film Freud in 1962, a grueling production that nearly finished him.

The studios grew cautious. He was difficult, they said, meaning he was damaged and they were no longer certain the damage was manageable. The insurance companies that backed film productions began refusing to cover him. The roles thinned. The man who had been offered everything in 1948 was being quietly set aside by 1963.

He died July 23, 1966, in his Manhattan townhouse, of occlusive coronary artery disease. He was forty-five years old. His housekeeper found him. He had been alone.

Elizabeth Taylor, who loved him as completely as anyone in his life managed to, said afterward that he was the most beautiful man she had ever seen and the saddest. Both things were true simultaneously, which is perhaps the most honest thing that can be said about Montgomery Clift. The beauty and the sadness were not separate conditions. They came from the same source.

The industry he graced for twenty years never quite knew what to do with a man whose gifts required his wounds and whose wounds required his gifts. He gave everything the camera asked and paid for it privately in currencies that don't appear in any ledger.

We see you, Monty. The work was always worth it. We wish the rest had been kinder.


MICHIGAN

BILL TILDEN

The Champion They Couldn't Forgive
1893 — 1953

There are athletes who dominate their sport and athletes who redefine it, and occasionally, very occasionally, there is an athlete who does both so completely that the sport before them and the sport after them are essentially different activities. Bill Tilden was that kind of athlete. He was also, by the standards of his era, a criminal, and the distance between those two facts is the distance between what America celebrates and what America cannot forgive.

William Tatem Tilden II was born February 10, 1893, in Philadelphia, into a family of considerable wealth and social standing. His childhood was marked by loss. His mother, his brother, and an aunt all died before he reached adulthood, leaving him in the care of a cousin and developing in him a solitary intensity that would characterize everything he did afterward. He was not an easy child. He was not, by most accounts, an easy man. But he could play tennis.

He could play tennis the way certain people can do certain things, with a completeness that suggests the activity was waiting for them specifically. He was six feet one, long-limbed, with enormous hands that gave him a grip and a reach that other players spent their careers trying to compensate for. He developed a serve that contemporaries described as physically intimidating, a cannonball delivery that arrived before opponents had fully processed that it had left his racket. He understood the geometry of the court with the intuitive spatial intelligence of a chess grandmaster.

He did not win his first major title until he was twenty-seven, late by the standards of the sport, which led his critics to dismiss him as a nearly man. Then he won Wimbledon in 1920 and did not stop. He won the United States National Championships seven times. He won Wimbledon three times. He led the American Davis Cup team to seven consecutive titles between 1920 and 1926, a period of national dominance in the sport that has never been equaled. He was the number one ranked player in the world for six consecutive years.

He did not merely win. He performed. Tilden understood that tennis was theater as much as athletics, and he played to the crowd with a showman's instinct that outraged the sport's establishment and delighted everyone else. He would sometimes deliberately lose sets to make the match more interesting, then win when he chose to. He argued with linesmen. He lectured opponents on their technique mid-match. He was imperious, theatrical, and absolutely certain of his own superiority in a way that the Philadelphia aristocracy had trained into him and the tennis court rewarded completely.

He was also gay, in the particular way that men of his era and class managed such things, which is to say privately, carefully, and with the constant awareness that discovery meant destruction.

The destruction came anyway. In 1946, Tilden was arrested in Los Angeles for a morals offense involving a minor. He pleaded guilty and served seven and a half months in prison. The tennis establishment, which had celebrated him for two decades, turned its back with the speed and completeness that institutions reserve for the

moments when they can finally say what they always privately thought. He was removed from every committee, stripped of every honorary position, disinvited from every club that had once been honored by his presence.

He was released, returned to tennis as a teaching professional because it was the only thing he knew how to do, and was arrested again in 1949 on a similar charge. Another conviction. Another prison sentence. The second fall was quieter than the first because there was less far to fall.

He died June 5, 1953, alone in his apartment in Los Angeles, of a heart attack, with his bags packed for a tennis tournament he had been planning to attend. He was sixty years old. The bags were still packed when they found him. He had been intending, until the end, to keep playing.

The sport he had transformed did not mourn him publicly. The Davis Cup victories, the Wimbledon titles, the six years at the top of the world rankings, these were not mentioned in the obituaries with the warmth they deserved. The arrests were mentioned. The prison terms were mentioned. The man who had made American tennis the envy of the world died in an apartment alone with his bags packed and the sport looked away.

What Tilden did was wrong. That requires no qualification and deserves none. But the distance between the crime and the erasure of everything that came before it tells you something about how America keeps its accounts, what it deposits and what it cancels, and whose ledger is allowed to carry a balance.

He was the greatest tennis player of his era. He was a man who caused harm. Both of these things are true and neither cancels the other, however much the era insisted otherwise.

We note you, Bill. The record stands even when the man cannot.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PAUL CADMUS

The Fleet's In

1904 — 1999

In 1934, the United States Navy demanded that a painting be removed from a public exhibition in Washington, D.C. The painting depicted sailors on shore leave in a city park, drinking, flirting, carousing, behaving with the particular energy of young men released from months of enforced discipline and celibacy. The Navy's official objection was that the painting was vulgar and defamatory, an insult to the service and its men.

The painting was The Fleet's In by Paul Cadmus, and the Navy's real objection was considerably more specific than vulgarity. The sailors in the painting were too physical with each other. The glances exchanged between certain figures carried charges that the Navy's public relations department recognized immediately and could not afford to have the American public examine too carefully. The painting showed, with the precise and unsparing eye of a trained draftsman, exactly what happened when young men spent extended periods at sea together and then arrived in port.

The Navy got the painting removed. They also guaranteed it would be famous forever, which is the customary result of official attempts to suppress art.

Paul Cadmus was born December 17, 1904, in New York City, the son of two commercial artists who gave him both the technical foundation and the professional understanding that art was work as much as inspiration. He studied at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League, developing a draftsmanship of almost aggressive precision, a command of the human figure rooted in the Old Masters that was genuinely rare among American painters of his generation.

He worked in egg tempera, a medium that demands patience and discipline, built up in thin translucent layers that create a luminosity impossible to achieve with oil. The technique suited him. Cadmus was not interested in the gestural and the approximate. He wanted every muscle, every expression, every fold of fabric rendered with an exactness that left nowhere to hide. His figures could not be generalized. They were specific people caught in specific moments, and the specificity was the point.

What he painted, with that unsparing precision, was the male body in motion and at rest, in company and in private, rendered with an appreciative attention that was not available anywhere else in mainstream American art of the period. He painted sailors and soldiers and laborers and athletes, the working male body as subject rather than symbol, observed with the eye of someone who found it genuinely interesting in ways the era's official culture could not entirely accommodate.

The Fleet's In was the most visible consequence of this, but it was not the only one. His paintings throughout the 1930s and 1940s returned repeatedly to homosocial environments, to the charged dynamics of men in close company, to the comedy and tension and occasional tenderness of masculine life rendered without the sanitizing distance that official culture required. He was doing in paint what the era's novelists and playwrights and

filmmakers could not do directly, showing what was actually there.

He was gay, and this was known within the art world without being the subject of particular drama. The New York art community of the mid-twentieth century was not indifferent to sexuality, but it was considerably more tolerant of diversity than the film industry or the military or the government, and Cadmus navigated his life and his work with a freedom that his Hollywood contemporaries would have found almost incomprehensible.

His long relationship with the painter Jon Anderson, which lasted from the 1960s until Cadmus's death, was not hidden. They lived together, worked in adjacent studios, appeared together in the art world's social life without elaborate fictions or arranged appearances. This was not nothing in mid-century America. It was, in its quiet way, a form of resistance simply by being ordinary.

The Fleet's In passed through various private collections after its removal from public view, its notoriety growing with each decade. It now hangs in the Naval Art Collection in Washington, D.C., which is either a satisfying irony or an act of institutional amnesia, depending on your disposition. The Navy that suppressed it now owns it. The sailors in it are still exchanging those glances. The painting has outlasted everyone who wanted it gone.

Cadmus continued working into his nineties, producing paintings of undiminished technical quality until shortly before his death on December 12, 1999. He was ninety-five years old. He had outlasted the studio system, the Hays Code, the Lavender Scare, the AIDS crisis, and the entire apparatus of mid-century repression, working steadily throughout in his own medium on his own terms, painting what he saw with the precision of a man who believed that looking honestly at the world was itself a moral act.

The Navy tried to make his most famous painting disappear. Instead they made it immortal. Paul Cadmus kept painting anyway.

We see you, Paul. You showed us what was there. You always showed us exactly what was there.

Baseball and Tennis

WHEN A YOUNG MAN'S THOUGHTS TURN TO SWATTING BALLS

There is a moment in late April when the weather makes a promise it actually intends to keep. The air has that particular quality of not yet being summer, still carrying the memory of cold but pointed unmistakably toward warmth. A man steps outside in the morning and something in his body responds before his mind has caught up. The winter's inertia lifts. The shoulders come back. The legs want to move.

This is the season's invitation, and it has been answered the same way for as long as men have had fields to play on and afternoons to fill. You pick up something and you hit something with it, or you pull something through water, or you chase something across a court. The specific activity matters less than the principle: the body in motion, the score kept, the outcome uncertain until the last moment.

Spring sport is not summer sport. Summer sport is languid, unhurried, the long afternoon game that can afford to take its time. Spring sport has urgency. The season is short. The window is open and will not stay open. Get out there.

BASEBALL

The first thing is the smell. Cut grass and turned earth and something faintly chemical about the chalk on the baseline, and underneath all of it the leather of the glove that has been sitting in the garage since October, slightly stiff, needing to be worked back into suppleness with oil and use. You fold it around a ball and put it under your mattress overnight the way your father showed you and his father showed him, and in the morning it has remembered what it is for.

Baseball is the sport that most completely captures the rhythm of American spring because it has no clock. Every other sport submits to time's authority. Baseball insists that the game ends when it ends, when the last out is recorded, however long that takes. This is either maddening or correct depending on your temperament, and your answer to that question reveals something about you.

The collegiate game in April has a quality that the professional game, for all its excellence, cannot quite replicate. These are young men playing for the love of it, or close enough to love that the difference doesn't show from the stands. The wooden bat has given way to aluminum at most levels below the professional, which produces a different sound entirely, a sharp ping rather than the crack that every baseball fan carries in their memory as the sound the sport is supposed to make. But the geometry is the same. The distances between the bases were arrived at by experiment and have not been improved upon in a hundred and fifty years. Ninety feet is exactly right. Nobody knows quite why, but it is.

The minor league ballpark on a Tuesday evening in May is one of the genuinely undervalued American experiences. The crowd is small enough that you can hear the infield chatter. The players are good enough to make the game interesting and young

enough that you can see them wanting it, the particular hunger of men who are almost there and know it. The hot dog is worse than you remember. The evening is better.

TENNIS

The tennis court in spring has been waiting. The net has been stored, the surface has been swept of winter's debris, the lines have been repainted with that particular bright white that will fade to gray by August. Someone has done this work before you arrived, which is worth a moment's acknowledgment before you begin.

Tennis is the gentleman's sport not because gentlemen play it, though they have, but because it demands of its players a particular combination of qualities that the gentleman's tradition has always valued: self-possession under pressure, grace in defeat, the ability to maintain composure while executing precise physical movements that fall apart the moment composure is lost. You cannot play good tennis angry. You can play it determined, focused, even cold, but anger tightens the muscles that need to be fluid and the ball goes into the net or long and the point is lost.

The serve is where character reveals itself. A powerful serve can carry a mediocre player a certain distance, the way a loud voice can carry a mediocre argument. But the return of serve, the ability to respond to what has been thrown at you with accuracy and intention, that is the skill that separates the player who has practiced from the player who has understood. Anyone can learn to hit a ball hard. Fewer learn to hit it where they mean to.

William Tilden, the greatest player of his era, understood this so completely that he could diagnose an opponent's psychological state from the quality of their ground strokes and adjust his game accordingly. He did not simply play tennis. He played the man playing tennis, which is a different and more interesting game entirely. The sport has not seen his equivalent since, though it has occasionally seen his ghost in the players who combine physical dominance with genuine court intelligence and use both without apology.

Spring is when the club season begins, when the courts fill again after the long absence, when men who have been confined to gyms and treadmills remember what it feels like to compete outdoors against another human being with a net between you and nothing to blame but yourself. There is a clarity to this that other sports approximate but tennis delivers directly.

ROWING

The river in early morning has a stillness that rewards the early riser and punishes no one who sleeps through it, but the rower is always up before the river has decided what kind of day it will be. The water is flat and slightly cold and the oar handles are smooth from years of use and the shell sits so lightly on the surface that it seems less like a boat than a theory of a boat, an idea about how little material you actually need between yourself and the water.

Rowing is the sport that most completely eliminates everything extraneous. There is no ball, no net, no opponent within reach. There is the shell, the oars, the water, and the work. The work is the same stroke repeated several hundred thousand times

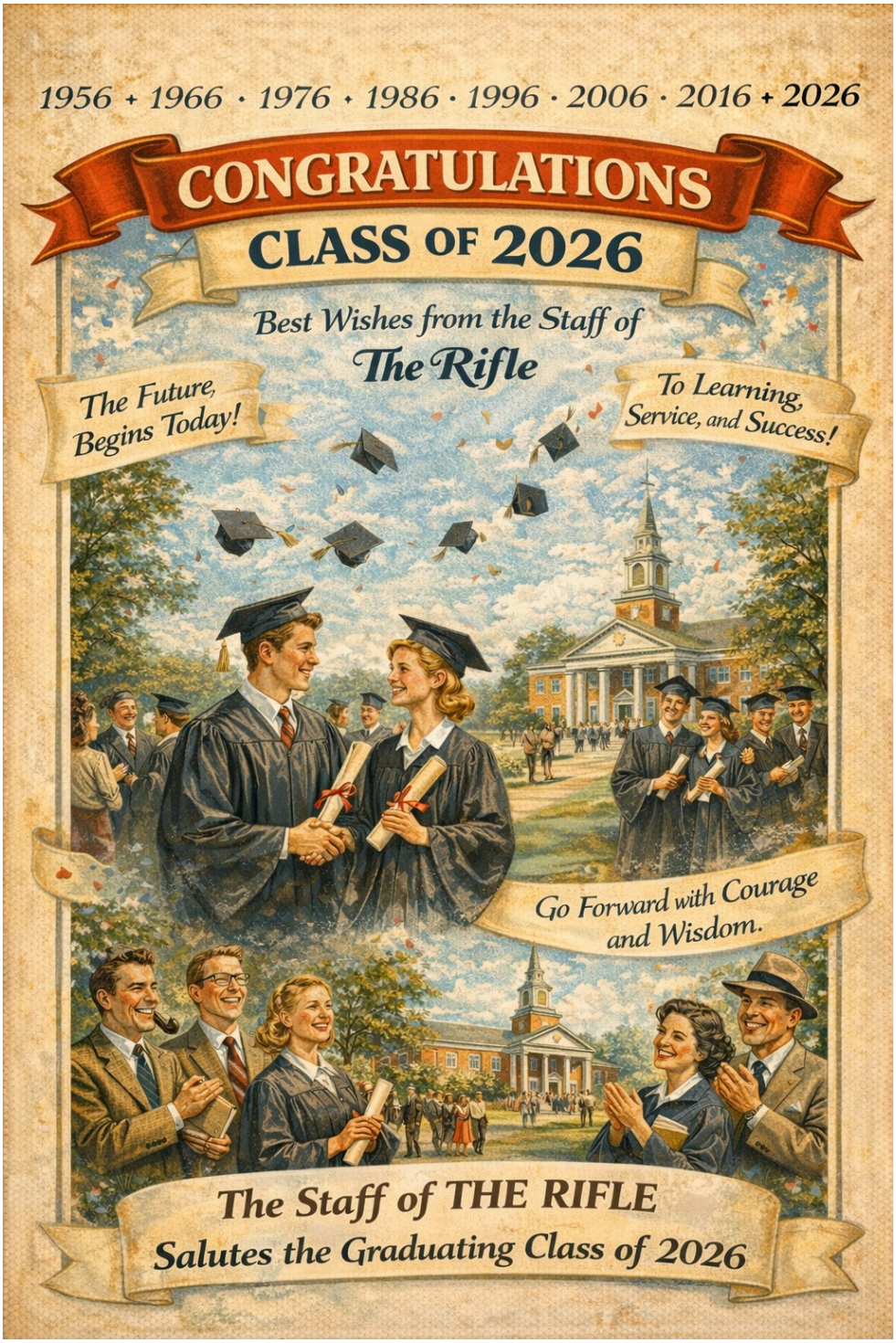
over a career, refined toward an efficiency that is also, at its best, a kind of beauty. The blade enters the water cleanly, the catch is made, the drive comes from the legs first then the back then the arms in the sequence that takes years to make automatic, the finish is clean, the recovery is controlled, and then again. And again. And again.

The collegiate regatta in May is conducted with a formality that seems almost anachronistic and is all the better for it. The crews in their shells, the officials in their launches, the crowds on the banks, the finish line with its judge's stand, everything has the quality of a ritual that knows what it is and intends to remain so. Harvard and Yale have been racing on the Thames at New London since 1852, making it the oldest collegiate athletic rivalry in America. The river doesn't care about the record. The crews do. That tension is the sport.

What rowing teaches that other sports do not is that individual excellence is necessary but insufficient. A crew of eight men must move as a single organism, each man's timing locked to every other man's timing, the whole greater than the sum of its parts or not competitive at all. The rower who is stronger than his crewmates and rows his own race rather than the boat's race makes the boat slower, not faster. This is a lesson that transfers.

The spring afternoon is still out there. The grass is cut and the chalk is fresh and the river is flat and waiting. The season will not stay open.

Get out there.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DECORATION DAY

The Meaning Beneath the Holiday

There is a word missing from the way Americans observe the last Monday in May, and the missing word is the old one. Memorial Day is what the calendar says. Decoration Day is what it was, and the difference between those two names is the difference between an abstraction and an act.

To memorialize is to remember in a general way, to set aside time for solemn reflection on the fallen as a category, as a concept, as the necessary cost of the nation's continuation. It is a worthy thing. It is also a thing that can be done from a distance, from a lawn chair, from the middle of a barbecue, with one eye on the grill and a sufficient portion of the mind devoted to solemnity that the obligation feels discharged.

To decorate is to go somewhere and do something. To cut flowers from your garden and carry them to a specific stone with a specific name on it and place them there with your own hands. To kneel in the grass and pull the weeds that have grown up around the marker since last year. To stand for a moment in the particular silence of a cemetery in late May, when the trees are fully leafed and the birds are loud and life is pressing in from every direction, and to hold the name of the dead against all of that insistent living.

That is what Decoration Day asked. It was never a passive holiday.

THE ORIGIN

The Civil War produced a quantity of grief that no existing ritual could contain. Between 1861 and 1865, approximately 620,000 American soldiers died, roughly two percent of the entire population. In a country of 31 million people, there was almost no family untouched. The dead were everywhere, in newly established national cemeteries and in churchyards and in fields that had been battlegrounds and were now simply fields again, marked or unmarked, remembered or forgotten depending on whether anyone who loved them had survived to do the remembering.

Communities began decorating soldiers' graves with spring flowers almost spontaneously in the years immediately following the war, North and South independently arriving at the same impulse. Women's organizations took the lead, as they so often do in the management of grief, organizing what had begun as private acts of mourning into community observances. Waterloo, New York claims the first official observance in 1866. Columbus, Mississippi makes the same claim. Charleston, South Carolina has perhaps the most moving origin story: in May 1865, a group of freed Black residents of the city decorated the graves of Union soldiers buried in a makeshift prison camp, honoring men who had died for their liberation. They called it, simply, Decoration Day.

General John Logan, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, issued General Order Number 11 in May 1868, designating May 30th as a day for decorating the graves of soldiers nationwide. The date was chosen deliberately: it fell at a time of year when flowers would be blooming across the entire

country, from the Gulf states to New England. The nation would decorate together, in season, with what the earth provided.

For the next fifty years it was observed with a seriousness that the nation brought to very few occasions. Schools closed. Businesses closed. Families went to cemeteries in their good clothes and did the work of remembrance with their hands. Veterans marched. Speeches were made that attempted, with varying success, to say what the losses had meant and what the living owed the dead. Bands played. Children who had never known the war learned from the adults around them that certain debts do not expire.

WHAT WAS LOST

The federal government moved the holiday to the last Monday in May in 1971, as part of the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which relocated several federal observances to Mondays for the practical purpose of creating long weekends. The efficiency was real. The cost was also real, though it was the kind of cost that only becomes visible gradually, as the meaning drains away from a date that no longer falls on the same day each year and is no longer connected to the specific calendar the original observance was designed around.

The long weekend arrived and with it the particular American genius for filling time pleasantly. The barbecue is not disrespectful. The family gathering is not disrespectful. Rest is not disrespectful. But somewhere in the decades between General Logan's order and the mattress sale advertisements that now bracket the holiday, the active verb at the center of the observance was quietly dropped. The decoration stopped. The going to specific places to do specific things with specific names in mind became, for most Americans, optional and then unusual and then largely forgotten.

What remained was the feeling that the day meant something solemn, a feeling honored more in the breach than the observance, sandwiched between the opening of swimming pools and the unofficial start of summer. The graves are still there. The names on them are still real. The weeds grow up around the markers on the same schedule they always did.

THE NAMES

This is the thing that resists abstraction most stubbornly: the names.

Every name on every stone was a person who had a favorite meal and a way of laughing and opinions about things that seemed important at the time. They were cold in winter and glad when spring came. They were annoyed by particular habits of particular people and devoted to others with a completeness that surprised even themselves. They wanted things they got and things they didn't get and things they never told anyone they wanted. They were not, while they were alive, symbols of anything. They were people.

The stone makes them symbols. The holiday makes them a category. The distance of years makes them an abstraction. Decoration Day, at its best and most honest, was a technology for resisting this process, for insisting that the name on the stone referred to a specific irreplaceable person and not merely to the idea of sacrifice.

The insistence required effort. It required going somewhere. It required kneeling in the grass and placing flowers and standing in the silence and saying the name aloud, or at least thinking it, specifically, not as a representative of a class but as itself, belonging to one person who is gone and will not come back.

This is what the holiday was built to do. It remains what it is built to do, however much the long weekend has obscured the architecture.

THE RESTORATION

Nothing prevents you from doing it this year.

The cemetery is still there. If you do not know where your dead are buried, someone in your family does, or the county records do, or a phone call will find them. The flowers are blooming. The drive is possible. The hour it takes is available if you decide it is available.

You do not need a ceremony. You do not need a speech or a band or an organization's sanction. You need flowers and a name and the willingness to go and stand for a moment longer than feels comfortable in front of the stone that bears it.

Bring the children if you have them. Show them what a name on a stone means. Let them put the flowers down themselves. Let them ask questions you may not be able to answer completely. The incompleteness is part of the lesson. We do not know everything about the people we have lost. We know they were real. We know they are owed something that a long weekend does not by itself discharge.

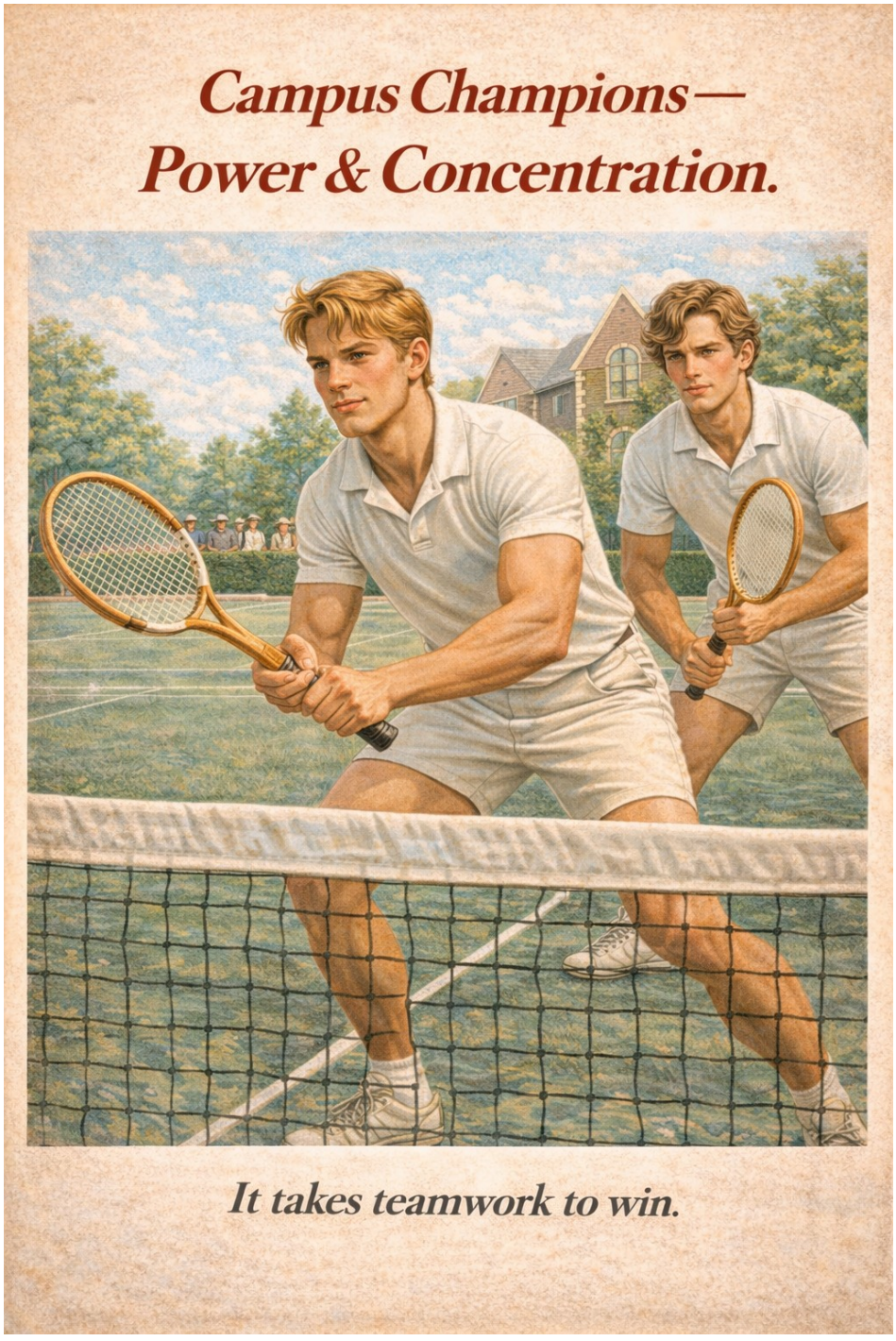
General Logan asked for one day. He asked for flowers and presence and the active verb of decoration rather than the passive noun of memorial. He asked us to go somewhere and do something with our hands in honor of people who gave everything they had.

It is not a large ask. It has never been a large ask.

It is, however, the ask.

Say the names. Find the stones. Bring what the season provides.

Decoration Day is waiting.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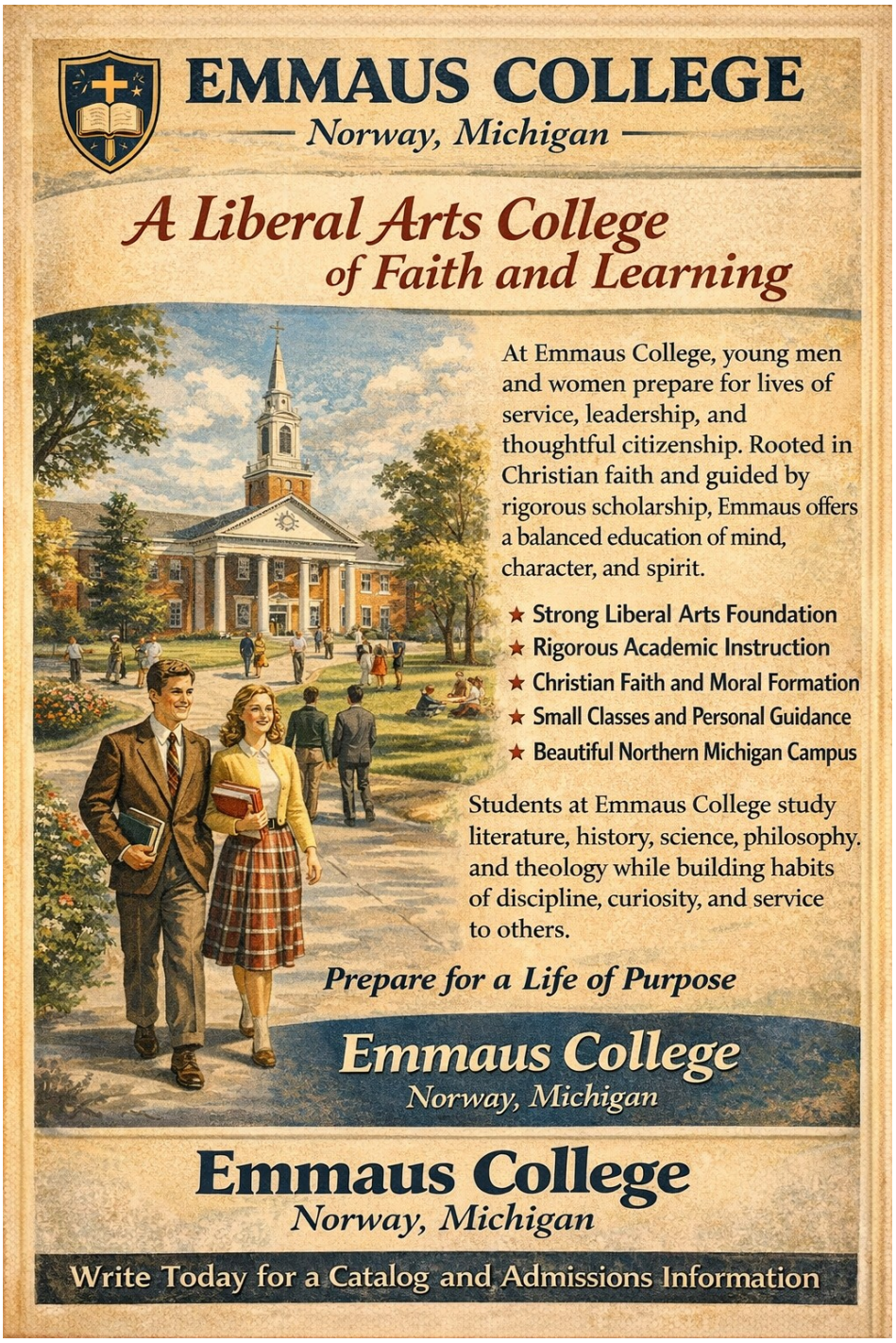
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FLAG DAY AND THE ARMY'S BIRTHDAY

June 14th

There are coincidences of the calendar that feel less like coincidence and more like the nation's unconscious arranging things properly. June 14th is one of them.

On June 14th, 1777, the Continental Congress adopted the Stars and Stripes as the official flag of the United States. On June 14th, 1775, two years earlier to the day, the Continental Congress authorized the formation of the Continental Army. The flag and the army that carried it share a birthday, which is either a remarkable accident of history or evidence that certain things arrive together because they belong together.

Most Americans know neither date. This is worth correcting.

THE FLAG

There is a version of the flag's history that involves Betsy Ross in a Philadelphia parlor receiving George Washington and producing, from a few snips of her scissors, the five-pointed star that would define the banner. The story is appealing. It is also almost certainly legend, first introduced by Ross's grandson nearly a century after the fact, unsupported by contemporary documentation, and accepted largely because it was a good story told at a moment when the nation wanted good stories about its founding.

The actual history is less tidy and more interesting. The Continental Congress's Flag Resolution of June 14th, 1777 specified thirteen stripes alternating red and white and thirteen stars on a field of blue, representing a new constellation. It did not specify the arrangement of the stars, the proportions of the flag, or who should make it. Early American flags varied considerably in their details, made by different hands in different places according to local interpretation of the resolution's spare language.

This untidiness is not a failure of the founding. It is a reflection of what the founding actually was: a improvised, contested, collaborative effort by people who were making things up as they went because they had to, because nothing like what they were attempting had been successfully attempted before, and the details would have to be worked out as the enterprise proceeded.

The flag that emerged from this process and was refined over the following century is a remarkable piece of design whether or not you approach it with patriotic sentiment. The proportions are considered. The colors are strong without being garish. The stars and stripes together create a visual rhythm that reads clearly at distance and in motion, which is precisely what a flag must do. It was designed, in the end, by use rather than by committee, which may be why it works.

Woodrow Wilson proclaimed June 14th Flag Day by executive order in 1916. Congress made it official in 1949. It remains a day of observance rather than a federal holiday, which means most Americans work

through it without particular awareness. The flag flies anyway. It has been flying for two hundred and forty-nine years over a country that has been, in that time, many contradictory things simultaneously, and the flag has flown over all of them without editorial comment.

This is what flags do. They represent the nation as it aspires to be, not as it always manages to be. The distance between those two things is the work of every generation, never finished, never abandoned, measured in the lives of the men whose army shares this birthday.

THE ARMY

On June 14th, 1775, the Second Continental Congress voted to raise ten companies of riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia to serve as a unified Continental force under central command. This was the beginning of the United States Army, though the men who voted for it would not have used that name. They were raising an army to fight a war they had not yet formally declared against a king they had not yet formally rejected. They were, in the careful phrase of the moment, taking measures for the common defense.

The measures they took were inadequate by almost every military standard. The Continental Army was perpetually undersupplied, underpaid, and undermanned. Its soldiers served short enlistments and went home when those enlistments expired regardless of the military situation. They were fed badly, clothed inadequately, and asked to perform with the discipline of professional soldiers while receiving none of the professional soldier's reliable support. At Valley Forge in the winter of 1777 to 1778, approximately two thousand of them died of cold and disease and malnutrition, not in battle, simply from the conditions of their service.

They stayed anyway. Not all of them, not always, not without complaint. But enough of them stayed that in the spring of 1778 an army emerged from Valley Forge that had been forged, in the old sense of the word, into something harder and more capable than it had been when winter began. Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, a Prussian officer of uncertain actual rank who had presented himself to Washington with credentials that were partly fabricated and entirely effective, had spent the winter drilling the ragged Continental soldiers into something approaching professional cohesion. The army that marched out of Valley Forge was different from the one that had marched in.

This transformation is the Army's founding story more than any single battle or declaration. Not the dramatic moment but the grinding one. Not the triumph but the endurance. The willingness to stay in the field under conditions that made staying unreasonable, because the alternative was worse, because the thing being fought for was worth the fighting, because men had given their word and intended to keep it.

The Army that descended from those ten companies of riflemen has fought in every corner of the world and in every kind of terrain and weather and circumstance that the world offers. It has been right and it has been wrong. It has performed with extraordinary valor and with extraordinary disgrace. It has been the instrument of the nation's best impulses and its worst. It has buried its dead in places whose names were unknown to American geography before the

Army arrived and are now written into it permanently.

It has never stopped being what those ten companies were: an agreement between citizens to defend together what none of them could defend alone.

JUNE 14TH

The flag and the army share this day, and the sharing is instructive. The flag is the symbol. The army is the substance behind the symbol, the human reality that gives the symbol its meaning. A flag without men willing to carry it forward is decorative. Men willing to carry it forward without a symbol worth carrying are just armed men in a field.

Together they constitute something. The nation at its most basic: what it claims to be, and the people willing to act as though the claim is true.

Fly the flag on June 14th. Not because the law requires it. Not because the neighbors will notice. Because the coincidence of this date is worth acknowledging, the flag and the army born two years apart on the same day, the symbol and the substance arriving together as though they planned it.

They did not plan it. But here they are.


Freedom Rises Every Morning.
Honor the Flag — Honor the Country That Made Us.

D-DAY

June 6th, 1944

There is a particular kind of courage that has nothing romantic about it. Not the courage of the duel or the single combat or the heroic charge where the outcome is uncertain but the odds are manageable. The courage of Omaha Beach on the morning of June 6th, 1944 was the other kind: the kind that looks directly at near-certain death and steps forward anyway, not because the fear is absent but because the thing on the other side of the fear is worth more than the life you are risking to reach it.

The men who stepped off the landing craft that morning into the cold water of the Normandy coast knew what they were stepping into. They had been briefed. They had seen the maps. They understood that the beach they were crossing was defended by prepared positions on high ground with interlocking fields of fire designed by professional soldiers whose only job for months had been to make that beach impossible to cross. They stepped off anyway.

This is the fact that resists reduction. Everything else about D-Day can be contextualized, analyzed, debated. The strategic necessity, the political decisions, the failures of planning, the elements of fortune. All of that is legitimate and important. But the men on the beach that morning cannot be contextualized into something smaller than what they were. They were men who walked into fire because they had been asked to and because they understood that someone had to.

THE PLAN

Operation Overlord was the largest amphibious invasion in the history of warfare. By the morning of June 6th, 1944, approximately 156,000 Allied troops would cross the English Channel and land on five beaches along a fifty-mile stretch of the Normandy coast. They would be supported by 11,000 aircraft, 7,000 naval vessels, and four years of industrial production by nations that had converted their entire economies to the purpose of putting those men on that beach on that morning.

The planning had been underway since 1943. General Dwight Eisenhower, appointed Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe in December of that year, oversaw an operation of staggering complexity: the coordination of American, British, Canadian, and Free French forces across every branch of the military, the construction of artificial harbors to supply the invasion once the beachhead was established, the elaborate deception operation that convinced the Germans the real landing would come at Pas-de-Calais rather than Normandy, the weather calculations that identified a narrow window in early June when conditions would be marginally acceptable.

The window almost closed. A storm system moved through the Channel in the first days of June, forcing a twenty-four hour postponement of the invasion that had already been set in motion. Eisenhower sat in his headquarters at Southwick House outside Portsmouth and listened to his meteorologists argue about whether June 6th

would offer the conditions the operation required. The window was narrow. The forecast was uncertain. The cost of further delay was measured in operational security and the psychological readiness of 156,000 men who had been told they were going and were waiting.

Eisenhower made the decision at 4:15 in the morning on June 5th. He wrote a note in pencil that he folded and put in his wallet, to be released if the invasion failed. It read: "Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the air and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone."

He kept the note in his wallet for five weeks before someone noticed he still had it and suggested he might want to destroy it. He had written it in the habit of command, the understanding that decisions have consequences and consequences have owners.

THE BEACHES

The five beaches were given code names that have since become as fixed in American memory as the names of battles that preceded them by a century. Utah. Omaha. Gold. Juno. Sword. The American sectors were Utah and Omaha. Between them they tell two very different stories about what the morning of June 6th was like.

Utah Beach, on the western flank of the invasion, went relatively well. A navigational error that deposited the landing craft a mile south of their intended position turned out to be fortunate: the defenses were lighter there, casualties were lower than projected, and the 4th Infantry Division was moving inland within hours of landing. By the end of the day, Utah had cost approximately 200 American casualties, terrible but manageable against the scale of the operation.

Omaha Beach was different in every way.

The defenses at Omaha were stronger than intelligence had indicated. A German division that aerial reconnaissance had missed was positioned on the bluffs above the beach. The bombing runs intended to destroy those defenses had missed their targets entirely, the bombardiers releasing too late to avoid hitting the invasion fleet and dropping their loads miles inland. The amphibious tanks designed to provide covering fire for the infantry sank in the Channel swells, taking their crews with them. The landing craft came in under fire from the moment they dropped their ramps.

The men of the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions stepped off into water that was in places over their heads, weighted down with equipment, under fire from positions they could not see and could not yet reach. The beach itself offered almost no cover. The shingle, a narrow bank of rounded stones at the high water mark, was the first place a man could lie flat and not be completely exposed, and reaching it required crossing several hundred yards of open sand while the defenses on the bluffs above fired into the mass of men below.

The casualty figures for the first hours at Omaha Beach have never been established with complete precision. Approximately two thousand Americans were killed, wounded, or went missing on Omaha on June 6th.

Companies that landed in the first waves suffered losses of fifty, sixty, seventy percent in the first minutes. There were places on that beach where the survivors could be counted on one hand.

They crossed it anyway.

Not all at once. Not in any organized wave. In small groups, following whoever was still standing, using whatever cover existed, moving because stopping meant dying and moving at least offered the possibility of something else. Sergeant William Stivison. Technical Sergeant Philip Streczyk. Brigadier General Norman Cota, fifty-one years old, walking upright on the beach under fire, finding the men who were pinned down and telling them that two kinds of people were staying on that beach, the dead and those who were going to die, and they had better start moving.

By nightfall the beachhead had been established. The bluffs had been taken. The men who had crossed that beach were on the other side of it, exhausted, diminished, holding ground that had been bought at a price that would take years to fully calculate.

THE COST

Total Allied casualties on June 6th, 1944 are estimated at ten thousand to twelve thousand killed, wounded, and missing. American casualties across both beaches and the airborne operations numbered approximately six thousand. These are the figures that appear in the histories and the documentaries and the memorial addresses.

They do not convey what they are meant to convey. They cannot. A figure of six thousand casualties is processed by the human mind as a large number and filed accordingly. It does not produce in the reader anything approaching what it should produce, which is the specific understanding that each of those figures was a person who had been alive that morning and was not alive that evening, or who would carry the evidence of that morning in their body for the rest of their lives.

The American cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer sits on the bluff above Omaha Beach. It contains 9,388 graves, white marble crosses and Stars of David arranged in perfect rows on nine thousand acres of Normandy grass that the French government has given to the United States in perpetuity. The graves face west, toward home.

To walk among them is to feel the inadequacy of every abstraction. Strategy. Sacrifice. The price of freedom. These phrases are true and they are insufficient. What is sufficient is to read the names on the markers, one by one, for as long as you can bear to. Private First Class. Corporal. Staff Sergeant. Technician Fifth Grade. The ranks they held and the names they carried and the dates that are all the same: June 6, 1944.

Eisenhower returned to Normandy in 1964 for the twentieth anniversary of the invasion. He stood on Omaha Beach and pointed to the positions the Germans had held on the bluffs above and said, quietly, to the television crew filming him: "It's a wonder they ever got off."

He had sent them there. He had written the note accepting responsibility for failure before they went. He had watched from England while they crossed that beach. Twenty years later, standing on the sand, he still did not fully understand how they had done it.

WHAT IT MEANS

June 6th is not a federal holiday. It passes each year without the flags and the closed businesses and the long weekend that mark the occasions the nation has decided require formal acknowledgment. This is perhaps appropriate. D-Day does not ask for a day off. It asks for something harder and quieter than that.

It asks to be remembered specifically. Not as the day we won, not as the triumph of Allied planning and American courage, not as the turning point, though it was all of those things. It asks to be remembered as the morning when young men who had been farmers and students and factory workers and sons crossed a beach under fire because they had been asked to and because they understood that someone had to and because the thing on the other side of the fear was worth more than the life they were risking to reach it.

The graves at Colleville-sur-Mer face west. They have been facing west for eighty years. They will face west long after everyone who was alive that morning is gone, long after the last veteran has been buried, long after the living memory of the day has dissolved entirely into history.

They are still there. The names are still real. The morning of June 6th, 1944 still happened, and the men who crossed that beach still crossed it, and what they did still means what it means.

Go find out what it means, if you have not already.

Then go find the graves, or the nearest ones to home, and stand for a moment longer than feels comfortable.

That is what June 6th asks.

It is enough. It is exactly enough.


Honor the Heroes of D-Day
Remember Their Sacrifice.

THE TRIUMVIRATE Three Nights. Three Places. One Story.

There are moments in history that arrive without announcement and change everything that comes after them. They do not look like turning points while they are happening. They look like ordinary nights in ordinary places where ordinary people have gathered to be, for a few hours, simply themselves.

Then something happens. And the night becomes permanent.

This section remembers three such nights, separated by decades, connected by a thread that does not break. Three places where people gathered because they had nowhere else to go, where they were met with violence for the crime of existing openly, and where the response to that violence became, in each case, something larger than the night itself.

We do not editorialize here. We do not need to. The facts are sufficient. The names are real. The dates are fixed in the calendar permanently, whether the calendar acknowledges them or not.

The Rifle acknowledges them.

STONEWALL June 28, 1969 Greenwich Village, New York City

The Stonewall Inn was not a nice bar. This is worth saying clearly, because memory has a tendency to polish things that did not require polishing at the time. It was a Mafia-owned establishment on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, operating without a liquor license, serving watered drinks at inflated prices, kept in business by regular bribes to the police precinct whose officers raided it periodically anyway, arresting patrons, humiliating them publicly, publishing their names in newspapers, and destroying their lives with the systematic efficiency of institutions that have decided a category of people does not deserve protection.

The patrons came anyway. They came because the Stonewall Inn, for all its deficiencies, was one of the very few places in New York City where gay men, lesbians, drag queens, and transgender people could exist in each other's company without pretending to be something they were not. The drinks were bad and the floor was sticky and the police came whenever they felt like it. It was still, for many of its regulars, the closest thing to home they had.

In the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, the police came again. This was a routine raid of the kind that had been conducted countless times before. Officers entered, demanded identification, separated those they intended to arrest, began the familiar machinery of humiliation that had always proceeded without significant resistance because resistance meant worse consequences and the people inside had learned, through long experience, that the

cost of fighting back was higher than the cost of enduring.

On this particular night, in this particular hour, something shifted.

The accounts vary in their details, as accounts of sudden historical moments always do. What is agreed upon is that the crowd outside, which had gathered as it always did to watch the raid, did not disperse. It pushed back. Coins were thrown. Then bottles. Then a parking meter, uprooted from the sidewalk by hands that had reached the end of something without entirely planning to. The officers retreated into the bar. The crowd outside grew larger. The night went on for hours.

The next night the crowds returned. The night after that as well. Six nights in total, the corner of Christopher Street and Seventh Avenue South becoming for that week a geography of refusal, of people who had decided, not uniformly and not with any single leader and not according to any plan, that the nightly cost of existing was no longer acceptable.

The Stonewall Inn had not been a symbol before June 28, 1969. It became one that night, which is how symbols generally work. They are made retroactively, by what happens after, by the meaning that accumulates around an event once the event's consequences become clear.

What became clear in the months and years following Stonewall was that something had ended and something had begun. The organizations formed in its immediate aftermath, the Gay Liberation Front, the Gay Activists Alliance, and the dozens of groups that followed, operated on a different principle than the homophile organizations that had preceded them. Where those organizations had argued for tolerance and acceptance and the right to be left alone, the new movement argued for visibility, for pride, for the right not merely to exist privately but to exist publicly and without apology.

The first anniversary of the Stonewall uprising was marked by marches in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago. Those marches became an annual tradition. That tradition spread around the world. Every Pride march in every city in every country that has them descends in a direct and unbroken line from the night a crowd outside a Mafia bar on Christopher Street stopped dispersing and started throwing things.

Marsha P. Johnson was there. A Black transgender woman, a fixture of the Village streets, a founding member of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries that she established with Sylvia Rivera in the months following Stonewall. She was among the first to resist that night, or near enough to first that the distinction does not matter. She spent the rest of her life serving her community, feeding people who had nowhere to eat, sheltering people who had nowhere to sleep, doing the unglamorous essential work that keeps human beings alive while the movement that her courage helped create built its institutions around her.

She was found floating in the Hudson River in July 1992. She was forty six years old. The police closed the case as suicide. Her friends and community said otherwise. The case was reopened decades later. It remains unsolved.

Sylvia Rivera was there too. A Latina transgender woman who had been living on the streets since adolescence, who had found

in the Village a community that accepted her when no other had, who fought that night and kept fighting, who was pushed to the margins of the very movement she had helped create when that movement decided respectability required distancing itself from its most visible members. She fought her way back. She spent her last years advocating for the homeless transgender youth who were living the life she had lived at their age. She died in 2002 at fifty years old.

Their names belong here. They belong everywhere the history of that night is told, which has not always been the case, which is a failure the history owes them.

The Stonewall Inn still stands on Christopher Street. It is a National Monument now, designated as such in 2016, the first National Monument in American history established to recognize the struggle for LGBT rights. The building is unremarkable. The sticky floor and the bad drinks and the Mafia ownership are gone. What remains is the address, the corner, the fact of what happened there on a June night in 1969 when a crowd stopped dispersing.

That night changed everything that came after it. Not immediately. Not without cost. Not without the losses that always accompany change of this magnitude. But the direction changed on June 28, 1969, and it has not changed back.

THE UPSTAIRS LOUNGE
June 24, 1973 New Orleans, Louisiana

Four years after Stonewall, on a Sunday evening in June, a fire started at the bottom of a staircase leading to a second floor bar in the French Quarter of New Orleans. The fire moved quickly. The windows had bars on them. The door at the top of the stairs had a lock that engaged automatically when closed. The fire moved faster than the people inside could find their way out.

Thirty-two people died in the UpStairs Lounge fire on June 24, 1973. It was, at the time, the deadliest attack on LGBT people in American history. It held that grim distinction for forty-three years.

The UpStairs Lounge was a gay bar on Iberville Street in the French Quarter, upstairs from a tavern called the Jimani. It had been open since 1970, run by a man named Phil Esteve, and had become in its three years of operation something more than a bar. It was a community. The Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination founded specifically to serve LGBT Christians who had been excluded from or driven out of their own congregations, held services there on Sunday afternoons. The night of the fire was the end of a Sunday, the congregation still largely present, the weekly gathering that had become for many of its members the closest thing to a church home they had ever been permitted to have.

The fire was set. Someone activated the buzzer at the bottom of the stairs, the signal used to alert the bar to visitors seeking entry, and when the door at the top was opened, a wall of fire came up. The accelerant had been placed on the stairs deliberately. Someone had decided that the people inside the UpStairs Lounge deserved to die, and had acted on that decision on a Sunday evening while a congregation was still present.

No one was ever charged with the crime. The New Orleans police investigated briefly and inconclusively. The arsonist was never identified. The case went cold and stayed cold. Decades passed. The file remained open in the technical sense that unsolved cases remain open. No one was ever held accountable.

The city's response to the deaths was, in the language of institutional behavior, instructive. The mayor did not issue a statement. The governor did not issue a statement. The city's Catholic Archbishop, Philip Hannan, declined to hold a memorial service for the dead. Several Protestant congregations similarly declined. The bodies of some victims went unclaimed for days because their families, confronted with public confirmation of what they had privately suspected or known, chose not to acknowledge them.

Reverend William Richardson of St. George's Episcopal Church offered his building for a memorial service. He was harassed for this decision. Troy Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church, came to New Orleans from Los Angeles to conduct the service. He was one of the few religious figures who came.

The names of the dead deserve to be here. Thirty-two of them, ages ranging from eighteen to sixty-five, gathered on a Sunday evening in a second floor bar in the French Quarter because it was their community,

their church, their home in the sense that matters most: the place where they did not have to pretend.

Ferris LeBlanc. Louis Broussard. Clarence McCloskey. Buddy Rasmussen, the bar's manager, who survived because he had gone to make a phone call and was not in the main room when the fire started, and who spent the rest of his life carrying the particular weight of the survivor. Mitch Mitchell, whose mother, when she came to identify his body, told reporters she had no gay son. Luther Boggs. Glenn Green. George "Gee" Courville. Adam Fontenot. Douglas Williams. Leon Maples. David Gary. Gerald Gordon. Bill Larson, a lay pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church, whose body was found in a window, visible from the street below, where he had been trying to get out when the smoke overcame him. He remained there for two days before the city removed him, visible from Iberville Street, a fact that the French Quarter absorbed into its daily life with the particular New Orleans talent for holding tragedy and continuity simultaneously.

The city eventually memorialized the dead. Not immediately. Not quickly. A historical marker was placed at the site in 2015, forty-two years after the fire. The Pulse massacre occurred the following year, briefly redirecting the nation's attention, before Pulse itself became the next entry in the record.

The UpStairs Lounge fire happened and the city looked away and the arsonist was never found and the dead were buried or not buried and the families claimed them or did not and the case went cold and the years passed. This is the record. It is complete. It requires no interpretation.

Thirty-two people went to their Sunday gathering and did not come home.

We say their names. We see them. We do not look away.

PULSE
June 12, 2016
Orlando, Florida

The third entry in this record is the most recent and therefore the one that requires the least historical reconstruction. The people who were at Pulse nightclub in Orlando in the early morning hours of June 12, 2016 are still alive, most of them, still living with what happened there. The families of the forty-nine who did not survive are still living with it. The city of Orlando is still living with it. The wound has not closed because it is recent enough that closing would be premature.

Pulse was a Latin night club, owned by Barbara Poma, who had opened it in 2004 in memory of her brother John, who had died of AIDS. It had been a fixture of Orlando's LGBT community for twelve years, the kind of place that becomes, over time, a geography of belonging for the people who return to it regularly. Latin Night on Saturday attracted a predominantly Hispanic and Latino crowd. It was a night for dancing, for being in each other's company, for the specific pleasure of music and movement and the presence of people who understood something essential about you without requiring explanation.

At 2:02 in the morning, a gunman entered the club. He was armed with a semi-automatic rifle and a handgun. He began shooting.

The attack lasted three hours. During much of that time, people inside the club hid in bathrooms and closets and behind the bar, texting their families, calling 911, holding each other in the dark, waiting. Some of the calls and texts were published afterward with the permission of the families. They are difficult to read. They are the record of people who knew what was happening and were describing it in real time to the people they loved.

At 5:53 in the morning, police breached the wall of the club and the gunman was killed in the exchange. Forty-nine people were already dead. Fifty-three more were wounded. The attack remains the deadliest mass shooting at an LGBT venue in American history and one of the deadliest mass shootings in American history by any measure.

The forty-nine:

Stanley Almodovar III. Amanda Alvear. Oscar A. Aracena-Montero. Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala. Antonio Davon Brown. Darryl Roman Burt II. Angel L. Candelario-Padro. Juan Chevez-Martinez. Luis Daniel Conde. Cory James Connell. Tevin Eugene Crosby. Deonka Deidra Drayton. Simon Adrian Carrillo Fernandez. Leroy Valentin Fernandez. Mercedez Marisol Flores. Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz. Juan Ramon Guerrero. Paul Terrell Henry. Frank Hernandez. Miguel Angel Honorato. Javier Jorge-Reyes. Jason Benjamin Josaphat. Eddie Jamoldroy Justice. Anthony Luis Laureano Disla. Christopher Andrew Leinonen. Alejandro Barrios Martinez. Brenda Lee Marquez McCool. Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez. Kimberly Morris. Akyra Monet Murray. Luis Omar Ocasio-Capo. Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez. Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera. Joel Rayon Paniagua. Jean Carlos Mendez Perez. Enrique L. Rios Jr. Jean C. Nives Rodriguez. Xavier Emmanuel Serrano Rosado. Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz. Yilmary Rodriguez Solivan. Edward Sotomayor Jr. Shane Evan Tomlinson. Martin Benitez Torres. Jonathan Antonio

Camuy Vega. Juan P. Rivera Velazquez. Luis S. Vielma. Franky Jimmy Dejesus Velazquez. Julio Cesar Mughnot Velazquez. Jerald Arthur Wright.

Forty-nine names. Forty-nine people who went dancing on a Saturday night and did not come home.

The response was immediate and enormous in a way that the UpStairs Lounge fire had not been. The President spoke. The flags flew at half-staff. Vigils were held in cities around the world. The names were read aloud in public, all forty-nine of them, which is the minimum that forty-nine dead people are owed and which had not been offered to the thirty-two dead of the UpStairs Lounge for many years after their deaths.

The difference between 1973 and 2016 is partly the difference that Stonewall made: a community that had organized, that had built institutions, that had established a claim on public acknowledgment that could not be entirely ignored even by those who would have preferred to ignore it. The dead of Pulse were mourned publicly in ways the dead of the UpStairs Lounge were not, which is progress of a kind, and which does not make the forty-nine any less dead.

The building that housed Pulse nightclub still stands on South Orange Avenue in Orlando. Barbara Poma has worked to establish a permanent memorial on the site, the onePULSE National Memorial and Museum, to ensure that the forty-nine are remembered with the specificity and permanence they deserve. The work continues.

The work always continues.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Three nights. Three places. Forty-nine years separating the first from the last.

The thread connecting them is simple and does not require elaboration: people gathered to be themselves, and were met with violence. In 1969 the violence came from the state, in uniforms, with badges. In 1973 it came from a single person with a can of accelerant and a decision. In 2016 it came from a single person with a rifle and forty-nine deaths and fifty-three wounds.

The response in each case became something larger than the night. Not immediately. Not without cost. Not without the names that had to be added to the record first.

The Rifle is a magazine about American culture, which means it is a magazine about all of American culture, the celebrated and the quiet, the decorated and the discharged, the men and women who shaped this country's life in ways both visible and invisible, who paid prices they did not deserve, who gave things to this country that the country did not always know how to receive.

These three nights are part of that culture. These names are part of that record.

We see them. We have always seen them.

We are glad you are still here.

A Catalog of Violence: Attacks on LGBT People and Spaces, 1969-Present

The fear that shaped closeted lives wasnt paranoia it was rational. This catalog documents major attacks from 1969 to present. Many others went unreported or were deliberately obscured.

1969 - Stonewall Inn, New York City Police raid on June 28 sparked multi-day riots that birthed the modern gay rights movement. Violent police harassment of LGBT people was routine; Stonewall was the night the community fought back.
1973 - UpStairs Lounge, New Orleans Arson attack on June 24 killed 32 people at a gay bar in the French Quarter. Three victims were never identified. Several bodies went unclaimed because families were too ashamed to acknowledge their gay relatives. No suspect was ever charged, deadliest mass killing of LGBT people in US history until 2016.
1977 - New Pontchartrain Hotel, New Orleans Arson at gay bar during Metropolitan Community Church gathering. Part of pattern targeting MCC congregations nationwide.
1980 - Ramrod Bar, New York City Ronald K. Crumpley opened fire outside Greenwich Village bar on November 18, killing 2 and wounding 6. Said gay men were agents of the devil trying to steal my soul.
1980 - Everard Baths, New York City Fire killed 9 men at gay bathhouse. Arson was suspected but never proven.
1990 - Uncle Charlie's, New York City pipe bomb explosion on April 28 injured 3 at Greenwich Village gay bar. No arrests.
1997 - Otherside Lounge, Atlanta Eric Rudolph (Olympic Park bomber) detonated nail bomb on February 21, wounding 5. Said attack was meant to send a powerful message in protest of Washington's continued tolerance for the homosexual political agenda.
1998 - Matthew Shepard, Laramie, Wyoming Twenty-one-year-old college student tortured, beaten, and left tied to fence on October 6, died October 12. Murder became national symbol of anti-gay violence.
2000 - Backstreet Cafe, Roanoke, Virginia Ronald Gay opened fire on September 22, killing 1 and wounding 6. Told police his mission was to kill gay people and force them all to move to San Francisco.
2006 - Puzzles Lounge, New Bedford, Massachusetts Jacob Robida attacked patrons with hatchet and gun on February 2, wounding 3 before fleeing. Shot and killed police officer in Arkansas days later.
2009 - Galveston, Texas Three men threw concrete chunks through gay bar window in March, seriously injuring patron who required 12 staples.
2010 - Multiple New York City Bars Frederick Giunta arrested October 17 for assaults at Ty's Bar and Julius Bar, hurling anti-gay slurs. Has history of targeting gay venues. Separate attack at Stonewall Inn bathroom same month.
2013 - Seattle Gay Nightclub Attempted arson on December 31 threatened 750 people. Fire extinguished quickly; no injuries.
2016 - Pulse Nightclub, Orlando Mass shooting on June 12 killed 49 people during Latin Night, wounded 53. Deadliest attack on LGBT venue in US history. Shooter pledged allegiance to ISIS during standoff.
2022 - Club Q, Colorado Springs Mass shooting on November 19-20 killed 5, wounded 25. Attack occurred during Transgender Day of Remembrance weekend. Shooter charged with federal hate crimes.

This list documents only the most prominent attacks and omits countless individual murders, assaults, and smaller-scale violence. It doesn't account for police brutality, entrapment, or institutional persecution through discriminatory laws. From Stonewall to Club Q spans fifty-three years of persistent targeting. The spaces where LGBT people found community were also where they were most vulnerable. The closet wasn't just about shame it was about survival.


JOIN THE ARMY
A MAN'S JOB FOR A MAN'S MAN.