

Ashley, Carlos

OLD MEN

I saw an old man weeping!

“Why do you sorrow so?”

“These grateful tears are for the
years of joy I’m blest to know.

“Old men don’t weep for money,
Old men don’t cry from pain,

They weep for love of kin and friends
They yearn to hold again.”

by Carlos Ashley

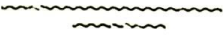
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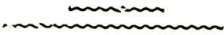
THESE TEXAS HILLS

 by CARLOS ASHLEY

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These Texas Hills are mine—
And where a trail grows dim
I mark its course again
With simple verse and hymn.



THESE TEXAS HILLS

✿



FOREWORD

Carlos Ashley grew up in the San Saba country. He has a feeling for its long wooded hills and its rocky stream beds that flood in the sudden spring rains. He knows the hard January sunshine of the West Texas plains, and the dancing August heat that burns up the grass. He learned these things when he was a boy, and he never forgot them during four years of college spent away from his own region. With a sure instinct he headed straight back to his own hills, and before long hung out his shingle in Llano. A lawyer by vocation, he is a rancher by avocation. In fact, his true "calling" is the urgent need to live on the Texas land.

Carlos Ashley not only knows the land; he knows the people along the San Saba and the Llano — cedar-whacks and lonely cow-hands and small town folks. He knows how they talk, not a dialect but their idiom and drawl. His verses are written in this West Texas language, authentic in rhythm and vocabulary. Here is a sample of the easy folk-talk he uses.

Now the more I tried to catch 'er,
And the more I give it thought,
I begin to get the notion
She's opposed to bein' caught.

If you read this quatrain in the native manner, the words will fall right, and the humor in it will break in the last line.

The real value, however, of the poems in "These Texas Hills" lies in their sure knowledge of how Aunt Cordy and Ole Edgar Martin and the legal owner of Cedar Mountain feel and act. They are old fashioned people, these folks that Carlos Ashley writes about; but they seem sound and permanent to me, like the Texas hills. And I rejoice that a young man raised among them finds them beautiful and good. I am glad that Carlos Ashley writes poetry about his own land and his neighbors.

Texas Christian University
June, 1941

Rebecca W. Smith

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THE BALLAD OF CEDAR MOUNTAIN

Did you ever hear the story
Of that famous hog of mine?
She's a razorback and spotted
Black and white from hoof to spine;

With a snout made outa granite,
She can root just like a plow,
And the fence aint been invented
That can turn that spotted sow.

Born an bred on Cedar Mountain,
She is wilder than a deer,
And she's known by reputation
To the ranch hands far and near.

Though a sow of mine had raised er,
On that mountain she was free,
And I always kinda doubted
That she really b'longed to me.

She didn't claim no owner—
Save the God who put her there—
And for mortal man's relations
She just simply didn't care.

She preferred the solemn silence
Of her Cedar Mountain home,
And most of all she wanted us
To let her plum alone.

Dedicated To

M. E. S.

Ever Fall I'd try to mark 'er,
But she'd get away agin,
And the church-folks said my cussin,
Though artistic, was a sin.

Well, I sold my brand in '30,
Moved out ever hog and cow;
Rounded-up ... yeah ... all but one head,
All but that damn spotted sow.

So we organized against her,
Got the best of dogs and men,
But we never got good started
Puttin that hog in a pen.

Now we really went a huntin
When we tried to catch Ole Spot;
We left the ranch at daylight
And her trail was always hot.

She might be pickin acorns
On the banks of Sandy Creek,
Or in somebody's turnips
Cultivatin, so to speak;

But let the foot of dog or man
Disturb the mornin dew,
And you might as well a phoned 'er,
Cause, somehow, she always knew.

She'd lightout for Cedar Mountain,
Where the land and sky divide—
There aint no spot on earth nowhere
A better place to hide.

We'd hear the pack a bayin
Up the mountain loud and clear,
But before we rode up to em
That ole sow would disappear.

Or she'd rally gainst a boulder
Bristlin like a porcupine
Til a dog forgot his caution
Then she'd cut him into twine.

Killing dogs was just a pastime
To that hog; I'm tellin you,
With them long, curved, knife-like tushes
She could slice a houn in two.

She could whip most any critter
On four legs I ever saw,
And she had a perfect record
Cause she never fought a draw

Now the more I tried to catch er,
And the more I give it thought
I begin to get the rotion
She's opposed to bein caught.

I couldn't help admire that sow,
When all was done and said,
For to tell the truth about er,
She was really thoroughbred.

She had character and courage
And the heart to do the right;
And when it come to fightin,
Now she shore as hell could fight.

Well, the Fall froze into Winter,
And the Winter thawed to Spring,
April watered hill and valley,
Maytime painted ever'thing.

Late one evening just at sundown
I was ridin home right slow,
When I passed a lonesome waterhole
And saw it was a show,

Ole Spot was trailing down the hill
And right behind her trotted
Ten baby pigs not ten days old,
And ever one was spotted.

I stopped and stared; she studied me;
My eyes filled like a fountain;
And there I gave Ole Spot a deed—
A deed to Cedar Mountain.

Now I was taught that folks who try
You oughta help an praise em;
So, "Boys," I sez, "Ole Spot's got pigs,
And, by God, gonna raise em."

She's still on Cedar Mountain—
Though I seldom see her now—
You can bet that's one dominion
Where the Queen's a spotted sow.

THE WIDDER

It gits kinda lonesome out on the divide
With never a woman aroun,
So about twice a year I saddle Ole Bell
And ride down the canyon to town.

I been sorter courtin a widder down there,
Though I aint never out and proposed,
I been a maneuver'n an sparrin aroun,
And we had the deal just about closed.

Course a man must be cautious where women's concerned—
It's a trail over mighty thin ice—
I been livin single for fifty-two year
While the widder, she's been married twice.

These females is might peculiar at times
And awful deceitful to figger,
The things that seem little before you git hitched
Next mornin may look a heap bigger.

So I been debatin this matter since Fall,
Which, in fact, was the last time I seen 'er
But the sap started risin right early this Spring,
And the grass and the trees all looked greener

Than I could remember since I was a kid,
And the bluebonnets bigger and bluer,
And the reasons for livin out here all alone
Seemed to fade and grow fewer and fewer.

The trail down the canyon seemed smoother that day,
And the mockin'birds sang a lot louder,
It mighta been me or the moon bein full,
Or the smell of her perfume an powder.

It could be her cookin that lulled me to sleep—
Them was wonderful biscuits and pies—
Or her tender, melodious voice as she sang
With a heavenly light in her eyes.

Whatever it was, it shore done the job,
I was just gittin ready to ast 'er,
When all of a sudden the front door bell rang
And who do you reckon?————the pastor.

Maybe I'm too suspicious of womenfolk's ways,
But I shore know a church by its steeple,
And I know ever preacher on top side of earth
Is dead set on marryin people.

The sight of that feller give me a cold chill,
My pulse took to jumpin an poundin,—
Him "sistern" an "brothern" all over the place,—
I felt for a fact like I's drowndin.

My heart turned a cat when that parson walked in,
The sweat started wiltin my collar,
That room was a furnace plum bakin my brain
An I knowed I was goin to holler.

I was just gittin set for one desperate lunge
For my hat cross the room on the dresser,
When the voice of an angel came out of the night,
Ole Bell was a nicker'n, God Bless 'er.

I lied to that widder: my horse wasn't fed—
Ah-h-h, the air was a tonic outside—
I rode all that night and I didn't slow down
Til I got back out on the divide.

I reckon I'll stay here the rest of my days,
I aint goin back into town;
I'll take mine a batchin and pamper'n Ole Bell,
We dont need no woman aroun.

OLE EDGAR MARTIN

I seen Ole Edgar Martin a-riding by jes now,
He's goin up to Walker's to get that bald-faced cow.
Funny feller—Edgar—sorter quiet and queer—
Why—he's been ridin by that way for nearly
twenty year.

I knowed 'im when he's jest a kid a livin at his
aunt's—
A wearin long tailed hickry shirts 'thout no boots
ner pants;
Sorter shied from other kids—his folks wuz all
that way—
A grazin off from all the herd jes like a maverick
stray.

He growed-up in these post oak hills, a hunting fox
and coon—
Hell—I can hear his ole houn now a bayin to the
moon
While boy and dog come down this flat—there warn't
much town here then—
Yeh—Edgar had a world o range to run them varmints
in.

But God, this town hev changed a sight—it aint the
same a-tall;
They-ve put in City Water Works and built a City
Hall.
And Edgar's changed a heap hussell—he aint quite
understood
That all the life he's honin for is gone—an gone
for good.

I reckon Edgar's sixty-five, and gettin feeble too—
He never took to no one trade—aint much that he kin
do.

So he just rides around all day—a sorter "livin sigh"—
A lost an homeless kinda look a starin from his eye.

He starts at daylight for the hills, when herds is
comin down,
An helps the ranchers and the boys to punch their
stuff through town;
He hangs around the pens all day to watch em load the
cars—
An nights—I've seen 'im on his porch jes lookin at the
stars.

He's pickin up a little stuff for Bigg's Meat Market
now—
Like goin up to Walker's there to get that bald-faced
cow.
I noticed when he passed jes now he didn't have no
houn—
So I guess I'd better saddle-up an help 'im into town.

OH WHERE IS THAT RIVER

Oh—where is that river Pa told be about
When I left for the Pecos this Spring?
I've rode and I've hunted nigh four hundred miles
And I dont b'lieve there is such a thing.

I'm dry as a powder house inside and out,
My pony is draggin his tracks,
I aint sweat a drop in a week an a half,
An this desert's so hot that it cracks.

Pa said it was hot down in Texas sometimes—
But I was a venturesome squatter—
He didn't explain to me when I left home
How a feller can live without water.

Them prairie dogs settin on top of their holes
A grinnin an twitchin their tails;
They know I'm a goner, just driftin around
Like a ship on the sea without sails.

Them buzzards keep circlin around and around,
Enjoying my miserable groans;
They're lickin their chops till my saddle horse drops,
Then they all will be pickin my bones.

Now I wouldn't demand a cool mountain brook
In the heart of a deep forest glade,
If I could but see just one lonesome tree
Where I could lie down in the shade.

If I ever get home and live to be wed,
When I tell how I come close to dyin,
If I have me ten kids and they dont weep out loud,
I'll whip the whole bunch for not cryin.

SO-LONG

I dream again of the days, agone
When I rode these hills with a six-gun on,
When I was young and the range was free
And a swell-forked saddle was home to me
In the days agone.

I slept at night neath the starry sky
There lulled to rest by the screech owl's cry;
My brothers, the wolf and the plaintive loon,
Watched while I slumbered beneath the moon
And the starry sky.

But—ah-h—those times have passed away,
The years have flown and my hair is gray,
I hear a knock at my cabin door:
Come, follow the riders who've gone before,
Who have passed away.

In evenin shadows, where mem'ries dwell,
I listen to stories the crickets tell,
The howl of a wolf sounds dolefully,
The voice of a brother callin me
Where mem'ries dwell.

My heart goes out to this comrade gray,
For he like me has had his day;
He chants the end of the cowboy's song,
And the hour has come for my last so-long
To this comrade gray.

AUNT CORDIE

You never did know Aunt Cordelia?
They's a gap missin outa your life—
She was sure a remarkable woman—
And I dreaded her worse'n my wife.

Her time was spent roundin-up mavericks
And brandin em out for the Lord;
Not many boys in this Hill Country
Escaped from the wrath of her sword.

She contest-rule rode the Devil:
A rakin in front and behind
She'd holler and come out a fannin
And kick 'im and beat 'im plum blind.

She worked at the job almost constant,
And rode with a mighty sharp spur;
There aint airy houn dog a livin
That could smell any better than her.

If I took a drink she could wind it,
I'd heap rather be throwed in jail
Than to see Aunt Cordie a comin—
She made the best sinners turn pale.

She caught us boys playin brush poker—
The way she depicted our fate,
Our chances of crossin the Jordan
Wasn't near good as fillin a straight.

So we promised we'd try to do better,
We listened to Aunt Cordie pray
And wound-up the meetin agreein
We'd turn out for preachin next day.

We all edged in under the arbor
And just kinda froze on the bench;
We stared straight ahead at the pulpit
And didn't dare wiggle an inch.

Aunt Cordie was leadin the singin
And playin the organ in style—
When she throwed back her head on
 "Old Canaan"
She could rattle the winders a mile.

The preacher was holdin revival—
He knew more sad stories to tell
About the few people in Heav'm
And the crowded condition in Hell.

The sinners seemed all time a dyin—
The flames were a scorchin their hide—
The whole congregation was shoutin—
My breast was a turmoil inside.

I lost count of time and location—
That fire was a cookin me brown—
Somebody was leadin me forward
And then we was both kneelin down.

Sure enough, Aunt Cordie had got me,
And all of the other boys too;
We joined the church at that meetin
Just like she had told us to do.

It's twenty years since that revival,
But folks here remember it still,
When Aunt Cordie contested the Devil
And rode him plum over the hill.

We buried her early last Summer,
And all of the boys she had saved
She wanted to be her pall bearers
And lay her away in her grave.

We fellers still meet and play poker,
And join in a drink now and then,
But drinkin a toast to Aunt Cordie
Couldn't hardly be classed as a sin.

THE CEDAR-WHACK

The North wind howls like a timber wolf
As it snaps at the flappin door
On the duckin shack of the cedar-whack
And his kids on the damp dirt floor.

A hardy man is the cedar-whack—
No part of the artful faker—
He clears the lands with his leather hands
For sixty cents an acre.

The rain and snow and the blazin sun
All lash at his hungry frame,
As he whacks away at the brush all day
In Winter and Summer the same.

He wields his ax with the skillful wrists
Of a sculptor carvin wood—
Now new grass frills on a thousand hills
Where the cedar brake once stood.

He sorts and stacks the posts and staves
Then hauls them to the yard
In his Model-T where he sells to me
For his beans and a can of lard.

OH, BURY ME SOUTH OF THE CAP ROCK

Oh, bury me South of the Cap Rock
Halfway to the Rio Grande,
Where the eagles sail
O'er the Spanish Trail
And the tall pecan trees stand.

Oh, my dreams are South of the Cap Rock,
Where the hills and rivers rise,
Where a sun-kissed peak
On the dimpled cheek
Of a Texas plateau lies.

Oh, it's springtime South of the Cap Rock,
And the bee-weeds blossom soon,
Where I used to ride
With my promised bride
Neath a lover's magic moon.

Oh, my heart lies South of the Cap Rock,
And there's where I want to die,
Near the Llano's brink
Where the cattle drink
And the nesting killdees cry.

Yes, bury me South of the Cap Rock,
By my love on a granite hill,
And we will sleep
While the mountains keep
Their vigil, eternal, still.

BOWIE'S BONES

Did you come to visit the Mission?
Well, stranger, I'll show you around;
They've got a museum in there in that room
But they's more things outside they aint found.

You see that name on the wall there?
James Bowie wrote that while he's here—
He was tryin to locate the tribe's silver mine
And lived with em two or three year.

It's funny bout yarns gittin started
And after a feller or two
Have made up a windy and wrote in a book
We swaller it just like it's true.

F'r instance they say Colonel Bowie
Was killed when the Alamo fell—
I never could figger how anyone knew—
Nobody was left there to tell.

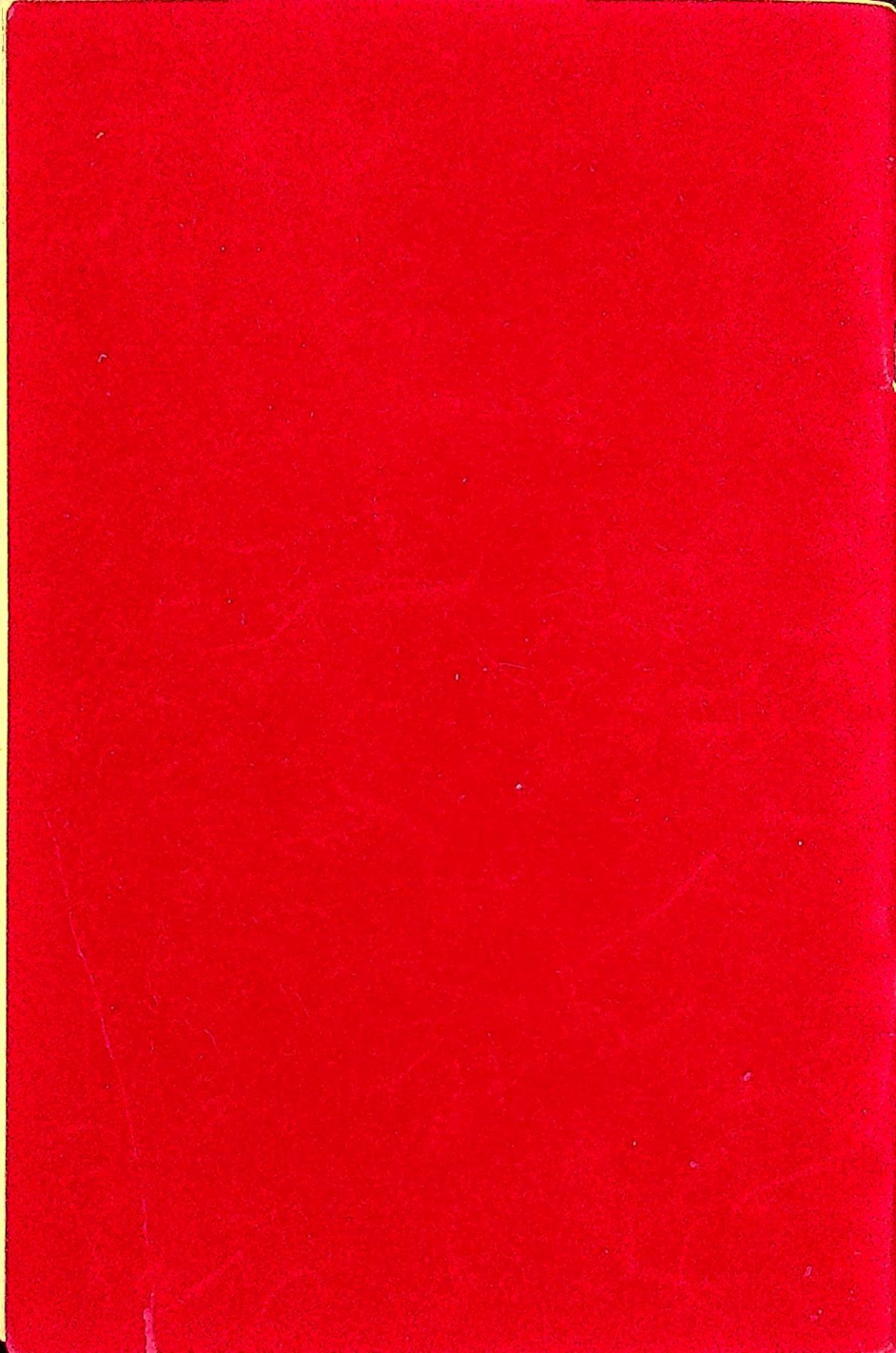
James Bowie warn't killed in that battle—
It's a positive fact and I know—
I dug up his carcass back there in the hills
And I got it right here for to show.

I was huntin them jack loads of silver
That Bowie was tryin to find—
I've searched for that treasure for sixty-odd year—
They call it the Lost Bowie Mine.

Not far from this San Saba Mission
I was diggin an old Indian mound
And uncovered his knife and a couple of guns
And silver slugs scattered around.

His skeleton lay there beside em,
Where the Indians had put him away—
They caught him a stealin their secret, you know,
And shot a hole through him one day.

Well, stranger, I'm proud that I met you;
Come around to my wagon some time;
Them museum folks charge yuh two bits a look—
You can see Bowie's bones for a dime.



Carlos Ashley and Red Steagall Join in a Tribute to Ace Reid

Carlos Ashley was named "Poet Laureate of Texas" in 1949, and Red Steagall was named "Official Cowboy Poet of Texas" in 1991. The twain did meet on November 6, at the request of the Museum, in an official cowboy poetry tribute to Ace Reid. Ace was the late Kerrville resident famous for his popular "Cowpoke Cartoons."

You really couldn't find a more unlikely looking pair sharing a stage than Carlos and Red, but remember, looks can be deceiving.

Carlos is 88 years young, and it's obvious that he has seen a lot of miles and withstood some heavy weather, but he still has a twinkle in his eye. As he moves to the center of the stage, the crowd hushes respectfully. His voice has that wizened crackle that comes with wisdom, as well as age. Red, on the other hand, looks like he is ready to tangle with the meanest of them. When he begins to speak, his voice echos and resonates with authority, reminiscent of the "the voice of God" speaking to Charlton (Moses) Heston in "The Ten Commandments."

Carlos was raised at the turn of the century in the Texas Hill Country near Cherokee and Llano. He has made his recollections of the characters and places he knew during that era the basis for many poetic ballads. For example, there was "Blacksnake Bill" who drove the freight wagon, making a weekly stop to bring supplies. Carlos was only about seven years old at the time, but he remembers:

*"... I can see his loaded wagon pulling into Cherokee
A six horse team a tuggin at the sand
They were leaning in the collar cause old Bill
was talkin loud
Like a king enthroned he sat in full command
He was loaded down with treasure like a galleon of gold
And I quickly ran to meet him on the hill
Then I climbed up on the wagon and proudly into town
I rode beside my hero, "Blacksnake Bill."*

Carlos also remembers "Aunt Cordelia" who set about to

save all the young boys in town from the sinful path. After collaring all these "mavericks," Aunt Cordy got their promise to appear in church the next day. What followed was:

*"... Aunt Cordy was leading the singin'
And playin' the organ in style
When she throwed back her head on the
"The Sweet By and By"
She could rattle the windows a mile"*

Well dear old Aunt Cordy is gone, but Carlos reflects:

*"We fellers still meet an' play poker
And join in a drink now and then
But drinkin' a toast to Aunt Cordy
Couldn't hardly be classed as a sin!"*

Red's ballads on the other hand, focus on the trials and tribulations of the cowboy. For example, there was the one about the cowboy who learned the hard way about a particular pony in the remuda who took a dim view of being spurred...

*"We busted in the open to a little sagebrush flat
I thought I might as well enjoy the ride
So I run my guthooks in him and he squealed just
Like a shoat
From that time on I never touched his hide.*

*I had a double handful of them cotton braided reins
I'd never known a horse that bad to buck
If I could get in one more lick I'd miss the prickly pear....
I guess I wasn't born with that much luck!"*

Within Red's stories there is always a lesson to be learned. The horse that bucks and throws will only make a good wrangler mount up and ride again. Red's motto? "You don't quit playin' cause you get old. You get old cause you quit playin'."

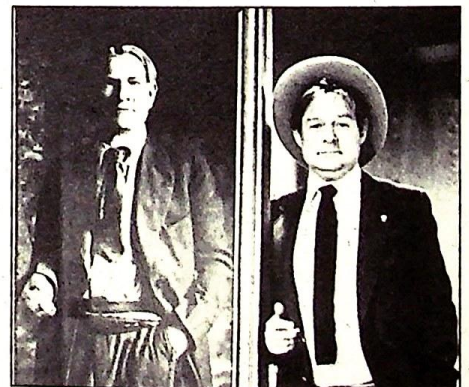
The Museum thanks this twosome for bringing their special talents to the Kerrville community. Incidentally, both men donated their time to come here and honor Ace. No greater friends than that, right?

An Original Experience - "Charlie Russell's Yarns"

The house lights have dimmed, a hush has settled over the crowd, and the show is about to begin. As you wait, you wonder what to expect from this performance by Raphael Cristy, titled "Charlie Russell's Yarns." The premise for this one man show is to explore the life of Charles M. Russell, the Western artist and storyteller. From a dark corner of the stage, Cristy meanders into the spotlight. He is wearing a comfortably worn jacket and rumpled tie. He tucks his pants into his boots, dons a well worn

cowboy hat, and softly begins to speak. At first, you hardly notice that you are moving, but hang on. A journey has begun and you are on your way back into the Old West. Before the evening is over you will be wishing you never had to come back to the modern world.

Such is the effect that Raphael (or should I say Mr. Russell) has on his audience. His storytelling is so engaging, his personal presence as Russell so believable, that the listener becomes totally absorbed and transported back in time.



Raphael Cristy (right) beside a painting of Charles M. Russell.