

Author Darla Worden, whose recently published *Cockeyed Happy* explores Ernest and Pauline's marriage against the backdrop of their Western summers. (Author photo by Kendal Atchison).



With the Newly Published *Cockeyed Happy: Ernest Hemingway's Wyoming Summers with Pauline*, Historian Darla Worden Offers Conference Attendees the Definitive Guide to Papa's Dog Days in the Equality State

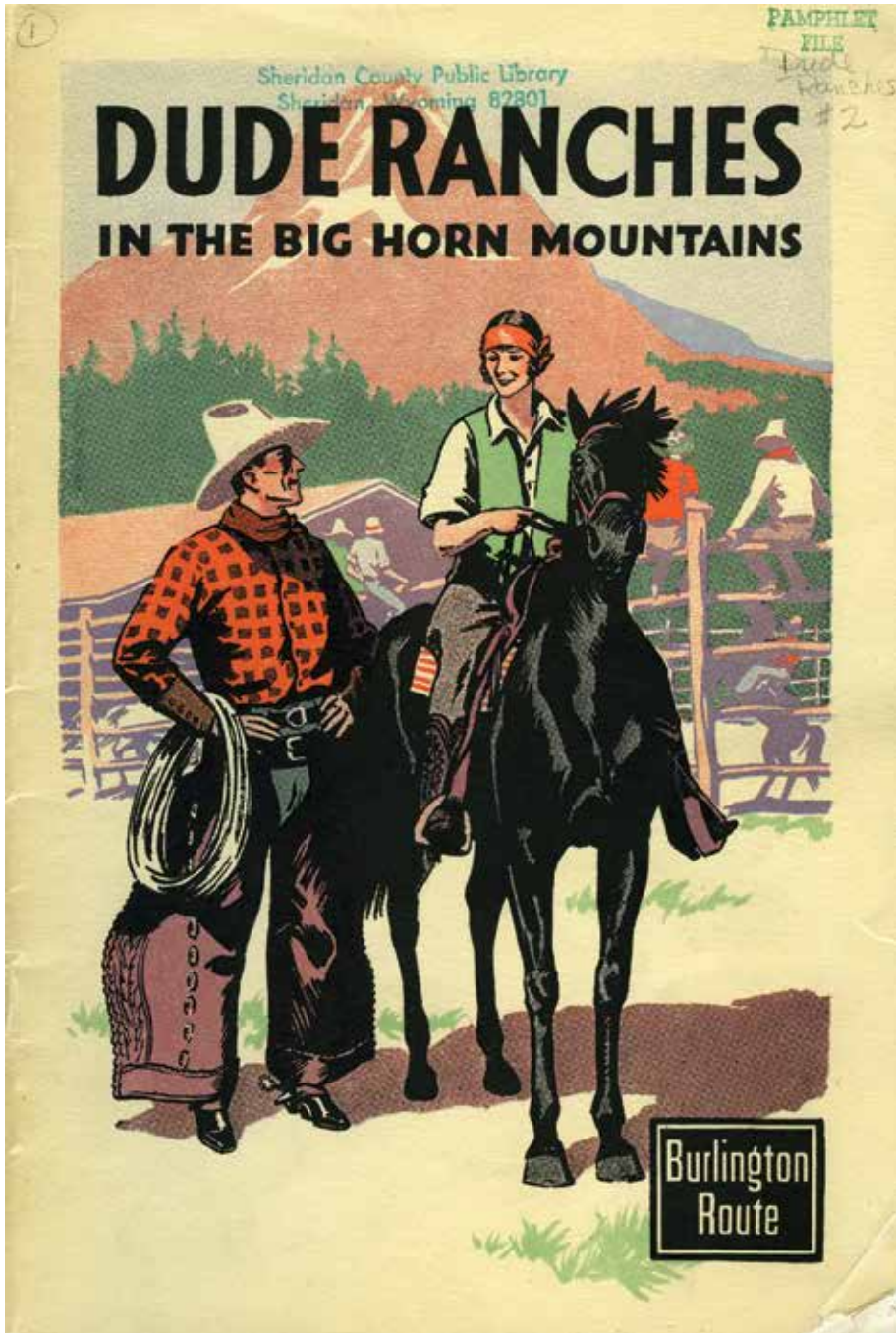
ED. Note: Along with Cooke City organizer Chris Warren's Ernest Hemingway in the Yellowstone High Country (2019), this authoritative look at Hemingway's underappreciated love of Wyoming is a Must Read before we're ridden hard and put up wet this July. We quizzed Darla on the book's background.

Q: *Where does your title come from? Did you know immediately when you discovered it you wanted to name your book after it, or did you have a list of options? And at what point in the writing did you make the decision that this would be the title?*

A: I noticed in both Ernest's and Pauline's conversations they used the word "cockeyed" as slang in the 1920s and when I researched it, I found it meant "crazy" as in "crazy happy." I read that Pauline said she was "cockeyed happy" when she received word that Hadley was giving Ernest a divorce. I felt *Cockeyed Happy* showed the feeling they had at the beginning of their marriage and time in Wyoming, and it also made the ending sad to think of how things deteriorated.

Q: *One of the qualities of the book I love is it's so novelistic: you really place your readers inside cars, rooms, and mountain landscapes.*

A: Thank you—I tried to write it in scenes like a novel. However, in nonfiction I couldn't just make up scenes; I had to find descriptions or photos or conversations that gave me the details I needed. In some cases, since it takes place in my home state, I have actually driven on the roads, visited the ranches, sat in Sheridan Inn and I drew upon those experiences.



Dude ranches promised vacationers a taste of cowboy life from the 1920s through the 1950s. Predictably, Hemingway found them phony and insisted his hunting and fishing were authentic immersions in the wilderness. (Courtesy Sheridan Public Library and Darla Worden).

Q: You talk about Hemingway's feelings about dude ranches, and how Wyoming was a kind of "incubator" of them in the 1920s and 1930s. Why was Hemingway so ambivalent about them, and how important were dude ranches to local economies in the West in this period?

A: Dude ranches were very important to the area, giving ranchers a revenue stream in addition to raising livestock. They were popular with a wealthy East Coast clientele, and Hemingway disdained

the "Social Register" nature of them. He preferred meeting real Western people, like hunting guides, horse wranglers, and bootleggers. But he was hypocritical in a way, because all of his Wyoming time was spent on dude ranches: Folly, Spear-O-Wigwam, and the L-Bar-T. He tried to be more macho mountain man, however, less dude.

Q: We might think of dude ranches as being macho oases, rustic worlds built for hearty he-men, but Folly Ranch was almost a sorority. Who was Eleanor Donnelly, and how did she get into the Western vacation business?

A: The word "dude" in dude ranch is the giveaway here. When I was growing up in Sheridan, "dudes" could be spotted downtown wearing brand new straw cowboy hats, and unusual clothes like khaki pants—not the same attire the real working Western folk wore. Dude ranches give guests a Western experience. However, horse wranglers saddle horses, meals are prepared, and activities are managed—unlike working ranches where cowboys and wranglers work hard to manage livestock as a job.

Although Eleanor Donnelly owned and operated Folly Ranch as a dude ranch, it was often full of cousins, friends, and sorority sisters—so more like summer camp for adults than a profitable dude ranch operation. Eleanor was from a wealthy Chicago publishing family, and she fell in love with the land when she was visiting a neighboring ranch. She bought the land somewhat spontaneously, her father paid off her loan, and Eleanor said it was the result of her folly—thus the name Folly Ranch.

Q: Despite all the time he spent in the West, Hemingway really only wrote one story about the place, the somewhat unjustly overlooked "Wine in Wyoming." Do you remember the first time tracking down details about the writing of that story in Sheridan? Did the story come alive after learning about its real-life inspiration?

A: I'm an "amateur" Hemingway scholar, so I haven't read everything he wrote. I just cherry-pick the stories that appeal to me. At my Left Bank Writers Retreat in Paris in 2010, one of the writers asked me about "Wine of Wyoming." What? I had never heard of it. When I returned home and looked it up, the descriptions sounded a lot like Sheridan, but I thought it was wishful thinking on my part. When I found out it truly was based in Sheridan, the story made a lot of sense to me.

Q: One of the interesting characters you describe is Maxwell Struthers Burt, who wrote a book called *Diary of a Dude Wrangler*, which is a great title. Who was he? Is he still well-known in Wyoming?

The Hemingways' cabin as it would have looked in the late 1920s. (Courtesy the Wyoming Room, Sheridan County Public Library System).



A: Maxwell Struthers Burt is very well-known in Wyoming, especially in the Jackson Hole area. A Princeton graduate and Oxford scholar, he opened his dude ranch, the Bar BC, and attracted a literary crowd of guests. He was against prohibition (a kindred spirit to Hemingway) and an environmentalist, who was instrumental in the formation of Grand Teton National Park.

Q: You begin each book with a list of things about Pauline that Hemingway loved. This is a neat device, and very inventive! What inspired this clever variation on the “listicle”?

A: When I started writing the book, I asked myself the question, “What did Ernest like about Pauline?” And I started making a list from comments he made in his letters to friends or quotes I found that he had said. But as time went on, I noticed that the things he liked about Pauline in the beginning turned into things that eventually annoyed him about her. For example, at first, he enjoyed her family’s wealth; in the end, he was bitter against rich people and he felt her money was a way of controlling him. So the list was a way to show the deterioration of their relationship. Interesting that at the end, the thing he still admired was her editing skills—even wondering if she’d be willing to read his work after they’d broken up.

Q: Another aspect of the book I like are the short chapters—not because I dislike long chapters, but because yours remind me of the vignettes in *In Our Time* (not to mention in our time). What inspired you to compact scenes into such tight frames?

A: Two things—I’ve always admired the style of the vignettes in *In Our Time*, and the short chapters gave the book a rhythm, moving the story along.

Q: How good of a horseman was Hemingway? Did he ride them a lot while in Wyoming and Montana?

A: I’m not sure about his riding skills, but from the descriptions of his antics—racing down the mountain on horse and riding through blizzards—my guess is that he was a competent rider.

Q: While I can totally picture Hemingway at home in the West—and the same with Pauline—that’s not necessarily the case with Gerald and Sara Murphy. How did they cotton to the region? What did it mean to them that perhaps Hemingway couldn’t appreciate?

A: Gerald and Sara Murphy didn’t fully appreciate the West—it almost seemed like they were visiting as sort of a bucket list trip rather than a true Western experience. Their lack of understanding and appreciation annoyed Ernest who had

developed a true affection for the people and experiences of the West.

Q: What was the biggest challenge in writing the book? One of the things I was struck by was in your acknowledgments you talk about the MFA you earned at Goucher College in creative nonfiction. How did that experience help prepare you to write the book?

A: I participated in the Goucher College MFA program when the term “Creative Nonfiction” was controversial because of the confusion people had over the terms “creative” and “nonfiction.” All it means is that nonfiction is written in the style of a novel with quotes, and scenes, but it must be factual, nothing can be made up. I feel like the tools the program gave me were exactly what I needed to write this book.

Q: I was delighted to see *Esquire* do an article on your book! What was that experience like?

A: The *Esquire* interview was a wonderful experience. The reviewer, Adrienne Westenfeld, had read *Cockeyed Happy* and understood what I was attempting to do with it. We chatted for almost an hour, and it was like talking with a friend. She made the interview so easy! ■