



WEBFOOTER EXTRA

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Remembering the Wild, Wild Westerns



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Remembering the Wild, Wild Westerns



Before Batman, before Star Trek and space travel to the moon, Westerns ruled prime time television. Warner Brothers stable of Western stars included (l to r) Will Hutchins – Sugarfoot, Peter Brown – Deputy Johnny McKay in *Lawman*, Jack Kelly – Bart Maverick, Ty Hardin – Bronco, James Garner – Bret Maverick, Wade Preston – Colt .45, and John Russell – Marshal Dan Troupe in *Lawman*, circa 1958.

Westerns became popular in the early years of television, in the era before television signals were broadcast in color. During the years from 1959 to 1961, thirty-two different Westerns aired in prime time. The television stars that we saw every night were larger than life. In addition to the many western movie stars, many of our heroes and role models were the western television actors like John Russell and Peter Brown of *Lawman*, Clint Walker on *Cheyenne*, James Garner on *Maverick*, James Drury as the *Virginian*, Chuck Connors as the *Rifleman* and Steve McQueen of *Wanted: Dead or Alive*, and the list goes on.

Western movies that became popular in the 1940s recalled life in the West in the latter half of the 19th century. They added generous doses of humor and musical fun. As western dramas on radio and television developed, some of them incorporated a combination of cowboy and hillbilly shtick in many western movies and later in TV shows like *Gunsmoke*.

The very first Western TV series written for adults, *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp* debuted in 1955 and it starred Hugh O'Brian on ABC. The half-hour Wyatt Earp series aired for 229 episodes until it ended in 1961. An unseen A cappella quartet randomly sings.

Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp — Hugh O'Brian

Hugh O'Brian was born Hugh Charles Krampe in Rochester, New York on April 19, 1925 and he was an American actor known for his starring roles in the ABC western television series *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp* (1955–1961) as well as films including the Agatha Christie adaptation of *Ten Little Indians* (1965). He also had a notable supporting role in John Wayne's last film, *The Shootist* (1976) as the last character killed by John Wayne in his last movie. O'Brian died on September 5, 2016.

While he was in college, he dropped out of the University of Cincinnati after one semester to enlist in the Marine Corps during World War II. At seventeen, he became the youngest Marine drill instructor. After World War II ended, O'Brian moved to Los Angeles. He had planned on becoming a lawyer and had been accepted at Yale University in the fall of 1947. He was dating an actress and attending her rehearsals of the Somerset Maugham's play *Home and Beauty* when the lead actor failed to show up. Director Ida Lupino asked him to read the lines. He got the part and the play received a tremendous review. An agent offered to sign O'Brian.

He changed his name after the show's playbill misspelled his name as "Hugh Krape." "I decided right then I didn't want to go through life being known as Huge Krape, so I decided to take my mother's family name, O'Brien. But they misspelled it as 'O'Brian' and I just decided to stay with that." Lupino then signed him to *Never Fear*, a film she was directing, which led O'Brian to a contract with Universal Pictures.

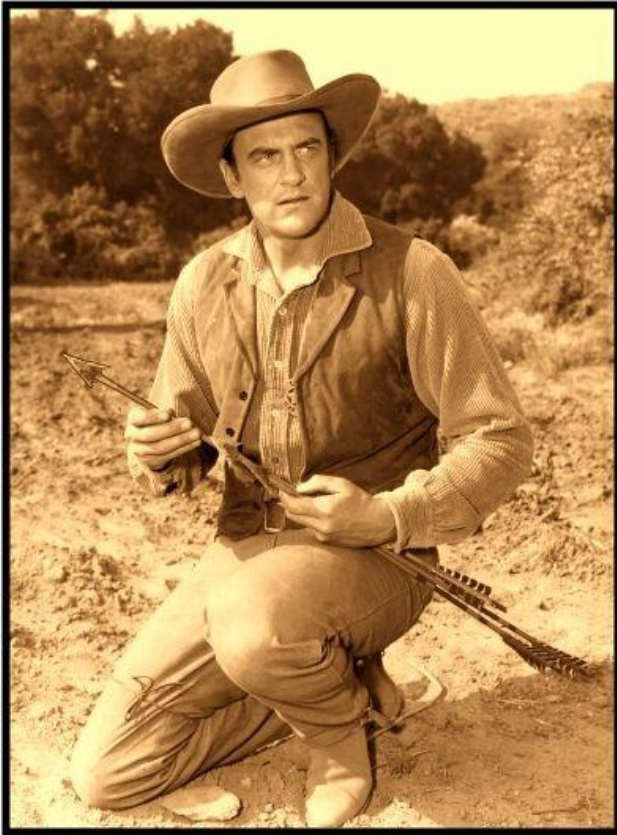
He was chosen to portray legendary lawman Wyatt Earp on the ABC western series *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*, which debuted in 1955. The series, alongside *Gunsmoke* and *Cheyenne*, which debuted the same year, spearheaded the "adult western" television genre, with the emphasis on character development rather than moral sermonizing. It soon became one of the top-rated shows on television. During its six-year run, *Wyatt Earp* consistently placed in the top ten in the United States. Decades later, he reprised the role in two episodes of the television series *Guns of Paradise* (1990), TV-movie *The Gambler Returns: The Luck of the Draw* (1991) and the independent film *Wyatt Earp: Return to Tombstone* (1994), the latter mixing new footage and colorized archival sequences from the original series.

O'Brian appeared regularly on other programs in the 1950s and 1960s, including *The Nat King Cole Show*, *The Jackie Gleason Show*, *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *The Dinah Shore Chevy Show* all in 1957. He was seen in Jack Palance's ABC circus drama *The Greatest Show on Earth*. He also appeared as a 'guest attorney' in the 1963 *Perry Mason* episode "The Case of the Two-Faced Turn-about" when its star, Raymond Burr, was sidelined for a spell after minor emergency surgery. He served as guest host on episodes of *The Hollywood Palace* in 1964 and the rock music series *Shindig* in 1965.

He was highly regarded for creating the Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Foundation, a non-profit youth leadership development program for high school scholars which has sponsored over 400,000 students since he founded the program in 1958 following an extended visit with Nobel Peace Prize-winning theologian and physician Albert Schweitzer.



Gunsmoke — America's Longest-Running TV Western



John Wayne was very influential as a movie actor and director and many of the western stars got their start with help from Wayne. *Gunsmoke*, the second Western TV series written for adults, debuted on CBS Television on September 10, 1955, just four days after the debut of *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*. James Arness, who starred as Marshal Matt Dillon was a friend of John Wayne. Wayne introduced the pilot of *Gunsmoke* and he described it as "honest and realistic." Many of the television series that became popular had also aired on radio, usually with different casts.

Gunsmoke takes place in and around Dodge City, Kansas, during the settlement of the American West. central character is lawman Marshal Matt Dillon, played by William Conrad on radio and James Arness on television. The radio series ran from 1952 1961. *Gunsmoke* was routinely placed among the best shows of any kind and any time. The television series ran for 20 seasons from 1955 to 1975, and it stands as the United States' longest-running prime time, live-action drama with 635 episodes.

The cominess of several of the cast members is one of the factors that contributed to the demise of *Gunsmoke*. Chester and Festus were not ideal role models, but their parts were heavily scripted.

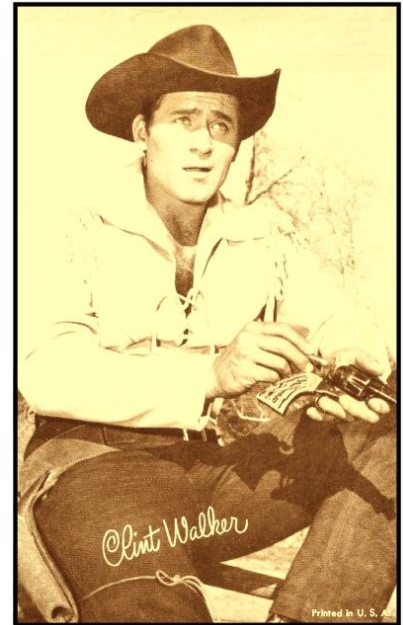
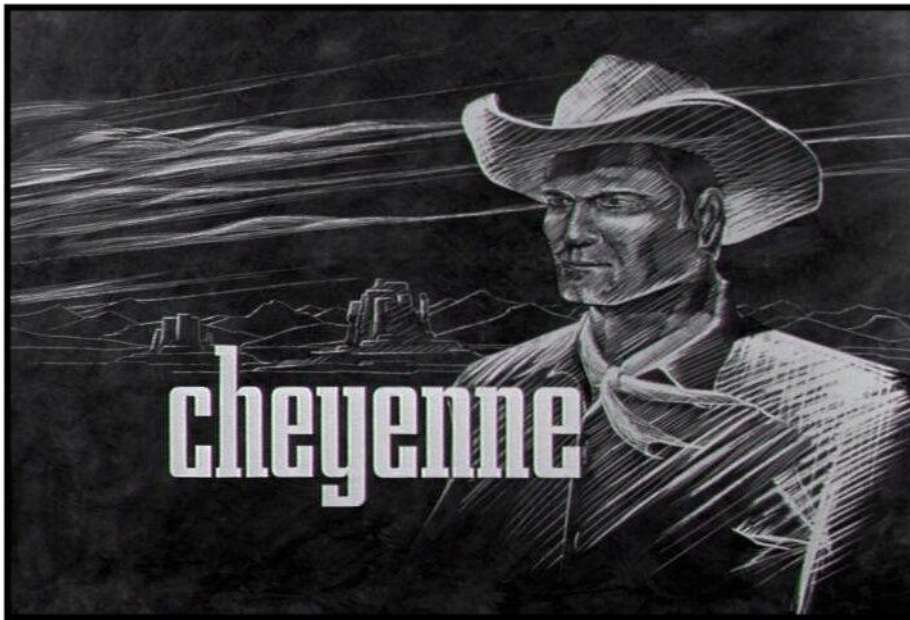
The Cheyenne Show — Starring Clint Walker

Cheyenne, an American western television show, consists of 108 black-and-white episodes broadcast on ABC from 1955 to 1963. The show was the first hour-long western, and in fact the first hour-long dramatic series of any kind, with continuing characters, to last more than one season. It was also the first series to be made by a major Hollywood film studio which did not derive from its established film properties and the first of a long chain of Warner Brothers original series produced by William T. Orr. The *Cheyenne Show* starred Clint Walker, a native of Illinois, who was born Norman Eugene Walker on May 30, 1927. Walker left school to work at a factory and on a river boat; then joined the United States Merchant Marine at 17 in the last months of World War II. After leaving the Merchant Marine, he worked several odd jobs including one where he worked as a doorman at the Las Vegas Sands Hotel. Walker also worked as a sheet metal worker and a nightclub bouncer.

Walker became a client of Henry Willson, who renamed him "Jett Norman" and cast him to appear in a Bowery Boys film as a Tarzan-type character. In Los Angeles, he was hired by Cecil B. DeMille to appear in *The Ten Commandments*. A friend in the film industry helped get him a few bit parts that brought him to the attention of Warner Brothers, which was developing a western style television series.

The series began as a part of *Warner Brothers Presents*, a program that alternated three different series in rotation. In its first year, *Cheyenne* traded broadcast weeks with *Casablanca* and *Kings Row*. Thereafter, *Cheyenne* was overhauled by new producer Roy Huggins and the series left the umbrella of *WBP*. Walker, as Cheyenne Bodie, was a physically large cowboy with a gentle spirit in search of frontier justice who wanders the American West.

The first episode, about robbers pretending to be Good Samaritans, is titled "Mountain Fortress" and features James Garner. The episode reveals that Bodie's parents were massacred by Indians. He was found by Cheyenne Indians, who then raised him. In the series the character Bodie maintains a positive and understanding attitude toward the Native Americans despite the slaughter of his parents.



Cheyenne aired from 1955 to 1963, except for a hiatus when Walker went on strike for better terms (1958–1959); among other demands, the actor wanted increased residuals, a reduction of the 50-percent cut of personal appearance payments that had to be turned over to Warner Brothers, and a release from the restriction of recording music only for the company's own label. The interim saw the introduction of a virtual Bodie-clone called Bronco Layne, played by Ty Hardin, born in New York City but raised in Texas. Hardin was featured as the quasi main character during Bodie's absence. When Warner renegotiated Walker's contract and the actor returned to the show in 1959, *Bronco* was spun off as a show in its own right and became independently successful.

For most of their runs, *Cheyenne*, *Bronco*, and *Sugarfoot*, starring Will Hutchins, alternated in the same time slot. *Cheyenne* was the senior partner of the three. Only a snippet of the *Bronco* theme song was heard in the opening credits, as a kind of aural footnote to that of *Cheyenne*. Occasionally *Cheyenne*, *Bronco*, and *Sugarfoot* appeared together in the same episode of each other's series. In the 1961 *Cheyenne* episode "Duel at Judas Basin," Walker, Hardin, and Hutchins join forces to stop a trapper (Jacques Aubuchon) from selling guns to the Sioux Indians. The trapper has also framed Tom "Sugarfoot" Brewster of murder.

Even after returning to the program — having been prohibited from seeking other work during the long contract negotiation — Walker was unhappy to continue to play a role which he felt he had already exhausted. He told reporters that he felt like "a caged animal. Though *Cheyenne* aired for eight years, the series made only 108 episodes because it was in repeated alternation with other programs and was out of production during Clint Walker's contract dispute.

The *Cheyenne* Show was well written and acted. It was very successful and it proved to be hugely popular for all eight seasons. Walker's pleasant baritone singing voice was also occasionally utilized on the series and that led Warner Brothers to produce an album of Walker doing traditional songs and ballads. Walker would go on to play roles in other television shows and movies. Walker reprised the *Cheyenne* Bodie character in 1991 for the TV-movie *The Gambler Returns: The Luck of the Draw* and also played *Cheyenne* in an episode of *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues* in 1995. Walker, now 89, is retired.

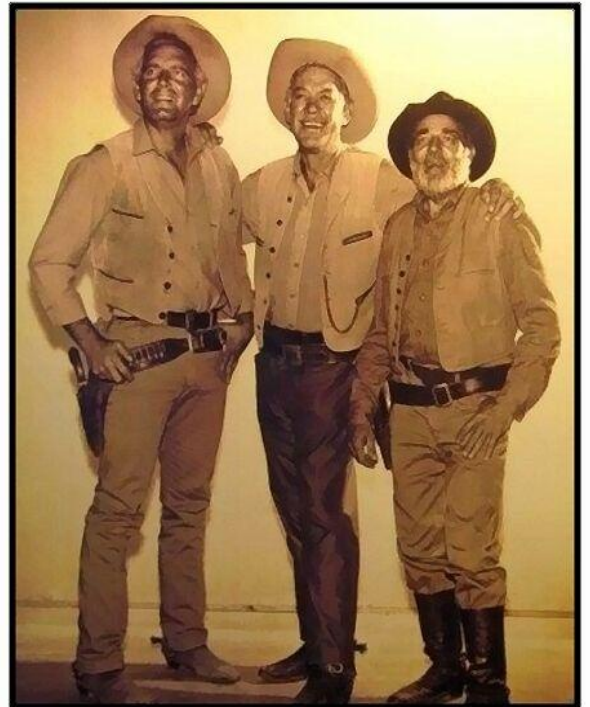
Wagon Train — America's Most Popular Western



Wagon Train first rolled on the air on September 18, 1957 to begin an eight-year run which would eventually place the TV show in the number one spot in the Nielson ratings. Unlike other shows in the Western genre, *Wagon Train* attracted big name guest stars whose stories were told across the panorama of the American western expansion in the post Civil War period. Each episode was titled around the story of a passenger on "the train." The cast was led by John Wayne's best friend, Ward Bond, playing Wagonmaster Major Seth Adams.

The show chronicles the adventures of a wagon train as it makes its way from Missouri to California. There were 284 episodes in eight seasons. Airing first on NBC from 1957 to 1962, the show moved to ABC airing from 1962 to 1965. The series was inspired by the 1950 film *Wagon Master* directed by John Ford and starring Ben Johnson, Harry Carey Jr. and Ward Bond, and it harkens back to the early wagon train epic *The Big Trail* (1930) starring John Wayne and featuring Bond in his first major screen appearance playing a supporting role.

Robert Horton played the scout — Flint McCullough. Horton's buckskin outfit as the scout in the first season of the television series resembles Wayne's, who also played the wagon train's scout in the earlier film. Former stuntmen Terry Wilson, as Bill Hawks and Frank McGrath as cook Charlie Wooster rounded out the *Wagon Train*'s staff in the early years. Wilson and McGrath stayed all eight seasons.



Wagon Train — America's Most Popular Western

Wagon Train debuted at number 15 in the Nielsen ratings, rose to number two in the next three seasons, and peaked at number one in the 1961–62 television season. After moving to ABC in the autumn of 1962, the ratings began to decline, and *Wagon Train* did not again make the Top 20 listing.



Original cast members Robert Horton and Ward Bond on the left and on the right: cast members from the final season from left: Robert Fuller, Barnaby West, John McIntire, Frank McGrath and Terry Wilson.

Sadly, Ward Bond died suddenly on November 5, 1960 at the age of 57. After several months, John McIntire transitioned to role of the new Wagonmaster, Christopher Hale. Following the show's move from NBC to ABC in 1962, Robert Horton's character Flint McCullough never appeared again, and no explanation was ever given. Horton left *Wagon Train* after five seasons of surveying the trail ahead to pursue a successful career in the musical theatre.

An episode titled "The Duke Shannon Story" aired on April 26, 1961 and Scott "Denny" Miller played the role of Duke Shannon who assisted with leading the *Wagon Train* and scouting roles. Heading across the trail to search for his father, young Barnaby West, played by Michael Burns, joined the cast in late 1963, staying until the final episode. Fresh off his success as Jess Harper in *Laramie* on NBC, Robert Fuller took on the job of scout Cooper "Coop" Smith in the last two seasons following the departure of Horton. Fuller physically resembled Horton and they shared the same birthday, albeit nine years apart.

Wagon Train aired for most of its run in black-and-white. That briefly changed during the show's fifth season (1961–62) on NBC, to help promote the sales of parent company RCA's color television sets, five episodes were aired in color. The series returned to its original black-and-white format for its first season (1962–63) on ABC, damaging the ratings, but the following season, as the series expanded to 90 minutes, it was entirely in color. In the final season the series reverted to both black-and-white and the 60-minute format. It was one of only a few series ever to switch to color and then revert to black and white. These switches, along with a time slot move to Sunday evenings for the first time, were significant contributors to the declining ratings that led to the series' cancellation in the spring of 1965. The final segment was broadcast on May 2, 1965.

Maverick — Starring James Garner



Maverick, an American western television series with comedic overtones created by Roy Huggins, aired from September 22, 1957 to July 8, 1962 on ABC and James Garner stars as Bret Maverick, an adroitly articulate cardsharp. Eight episodes into the first season, he was joined by Jack Kelly as his brother Bart, and from that point on, Garner and Kelly alternated leads from week to week, sometimes teaming up for the occasional two-brother episode. The Mavericks were poker players from Texas who traveled all over the American Old West and on Mississippi riverboats, constantly getting into and out of life-threatening trouble of one sort or another, usually involving money, women, or both. They would typically find themselves weighing a financial windfall against a moral dilemma. More often than not, their consciences trumped their wallets since both Mavericks were intrinsically ethical.

When Garner left the series after the third season due to a legal dispute, Roger Moore was added to the cast as their cousin Beau Maverick. Robert Colbert appeared later in the fourth season as a third Maverick brother, Brent Maverick.

The popular James Garner (born James Scott Bumgarner; April 7, 1928 – July 19, 2014) was an American actor, producer, and voice artist. He starred in several television series over more than five decades, including such popular roles as Bret Maverick in the 1950s western comedy series *Maverick* and Jim Rockford in *The Rockford Files*, and he played leading roles in more than 50 theatrical films.

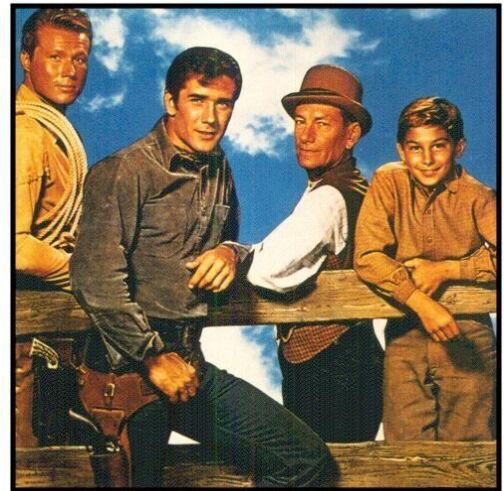


Lawman — Starring John Russell and Peter Brown

Lawman is an American western television series originally telecast on ABC from 1958 to 1962 starring John Russell as Marshal Dan Troup and featuring Peter Brown as Deputy Marshal Johnny McKay. The series was set in Laramie, Wyoming from 1879 into the 1880s. Dan Troup leaves Abilene, Kansas for the town of Laramie, Wyoming. He is offered the town marshal's job after the previous marshal, David Lemp, is murdered. On the way into town, he meets Johnny McKay, who is placing a tombstone on Lemp's grave. Troup puts up a "Deputy Wanted" sign and Johnny applies for the job, but Dan turns him down, because he believes that, at the age of nineteen, Johnny is too young. After backing Dan up unexpectedly in a shootout, Dan changes his mind and hires Johnny McKay.

During the course of the first season, Dan teaches Johnny the fundamentals of law enforcement. Frequently, while Dan is pursuing outlaws, Johnny remains behind to guard the town. However, in seasons two through four, Johnny becomes more involved in the action and carries some entire episodes by himself. At the start of season two, Russell and Brown were joined by Peggie Castle as Lily Merrill, the owner of the Birdcage Saloon, and a love interest for Dan.

Laramie — Starring John Smith and Robert Fuller



Laramie was an American western television series that aired on NBC from 1959 to 1963. A Revue Studios (Universal Studios division) production, the program originally starred John Smith as Slim Sherman, Robert Fuller as Jess Harper, Hoagy Carmichael as Jonesy and Robert Crawford, Jr. as Andy Sherman. Actress Spring Byington was later added to the cast.

The two Sherman brothers and a drifter, Jess Harper, come together to run a stagecoach stop for the Great Central Overland Mail Company after the Shermans' father, Matt, was murdered by a greedy land seeker. The series premiere "Stage Stop" (September 15, 1959), which was filmed in color, explains how Slim Sherman and Jess Harper become partners in the Sherman Ranch and Relay Station. Jess arrives in Wyoming from Texas in search of an elusive friend. Hoagy Carmichael's contract was not renewed after the first season, and his character was eliminated with the explanation that he had accompanied Andy to boarding school in St. Louis, Missouri. Andy, however, returned to appear in three episodes in the first half of the second season.

To restore the chemistry of the original cast, as the third season began in 1961, Spring Byington, formerly of the sitcom *December Bride*, and Dennis Holmes joined the series in the roles of Daisy Cooper, a matronly widow, and Mike Williams, a young orphan permitted to live at the Sherman Ranch pending location of any next of kin, which never happened. *Laramie* made the transition from black-and-white to color at the beginning of its third season. Unfortunately because of declining ratings in its fourth season, *Laramie* was canceled.