



Celluloid Pueblo: Western Ways Films and the Invention of the Postwar Southwest

Jennifer L. Jenkins

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The five Cs of Arizona—copper, cattle, cotton, citrus, and climate—formed the basis of the state’s livelihood and a readymade roster of subjects for films. With an eye on the developing national appetite for all things western, Charles and Lucile Herbert founded Western Ways Features in 1936 to document the landscape, regional development, and diverse cultures of Arizona, the U.S. Southwest, and northern Mexico.

Celluloid Pueblo tells the story of Western Ways Features and its role in the invention of the Southwest of the imagination. Active during a thirty-year period of profound growth and transformation, the Herberts created a dynamic visual record of the region, and their archival films now serve as a time capsule of the Sunbelt in the mid-twentieth century. Drawing upon a ten-year career with Fox, Western Ways owner-operator Charles Herbert brought a newshound’s sensibility and acute skill at in-camera editing to his southwestern subjects. The Western Ways films provided counternarratives to Hollywood representations of the West and established the regional identity of Tucson and the borderlands.

Jennifer L. Jenkins’s broad-sweeping book examines the Herberts’ work on some of the first sound films in the Arizona borderlands and their ongoing promotion of the Southwest. The book covers the filmic representation of Native and Mexican lifeways, Anglo ranching and leisure, Mexican missions and tourism, and postwar borderlands prosperity and progressivism. The story of Western Ways closely follows the boom-and-bust arc of the midcentury Southwest and the constantly evolving representations of an exotic—but safe and domesticated—frontier.

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