populates the country and abandon it."

In 1957 Walter Prescott Webb published an article in Harper's Magazine titled "The American West, Perpetual Mirage." It provides an image that continues to haunt. He points to the eight mountain and intermountain states as the true and perpetual desert. Bordering it east and west are large areas into which the desert expands and contracts with some irregularity. Hence desert conditions pulse forward and backward. The result is that the annual cycle of reaping and harvesting is broken and longer cycles of income prevail, to which the local economy is not attuned—so the reliance on outside support for survival. This image can also be applied to other desert margins, conspicuously in Africa. Famines as well as rescue help from outside sources are the result. This suggests a nomadic form of life, for man and animals. In this light we may well pay our respects to the Plains Indians, who followed the buffalo, who followed the grass, which followed the rains.

### Innovation, Creativity, with Only One Leg

**Merritt "Bud" Parks**

In the days before the government had decided it was wise to encourage soil and range conservation, an individual in Oregon stood out as an example of vision and foresight in coping with the severe problems of the time. He was John H. Harrison, whose intellect and sense of humor impressed everyone he met. The 35-year portion of his life spent on the Oregon Desert near Fort Rock left an indelible mark on the land as a prototype and pointed the way to the improved conservation methods of later years.

During the period of 1914 to 1917, when it became apparent that their situation was almost hopeless, homesteaders struggled out of the Fort Rock Valley and the Oregon Desert. With nine and one half inches of annual rainfall, it was not farming country.

Their hardships seemed to produce resourceful people who were able to find productive lives elsewhere. Many of the homesteaders, writing of the experiences later, thought of it less as the disaster which it was, rather as a time of some adventure.

The land they left behind had taken a severe beating. Mercifully, some fields reverted to sagebrush; but others, exposed to wind erosion, worn down to hardpan and mineral earth where nothing has grown for over 75 years. For the few people who remained, the grim struggle for survival produced widespread uncontrolled grazing which, over the years, was probably more devastating than the plow. When the homesteaders left, many of their houses were later burned, leaving little to show for their efforts but a devastated landscape.

Harrison lived through the homestead era. His actions in the aftermath period appear astonishingly insightful, and his ideas left an imprint on a tremendous area of land. Harrison was believed to be a native of Arkansas, had studied law, and had come west to be the Indian Agent at the Klamath Agency. It was said that he did not like the ethics and principles employed at the reservation and, believing he saw an opportunity at Fort Rock, resigned.

Arriving in 1908, he purchased a state-owned school section, Sec. 16, (T25S, R15E) three and a half miles north of the village of Fort Rock, Oregon, and homesteaded additional acres. He had a house and outbuildings to form a rather impressive compound.

After the homesteaders left, grazing in the valley was up for grabs as there was no entity with authority to control the abandoned areas. The remaining stockmen cut fences in corners where cattle might get trapped away from water, all the while trying to control some tracts with good fences where forage could be saved for use later in the season. This situation continued for nearly two decades and resulted in appalling overgrazing and wind erosion. Harrison did not participate in this devil-take-the-hindmost operation. Rather, he rented or paid taxes on a huge blocked area of abandoned land to establish some sort of legitimacy. He then removed interior homestead fences and built good outside fences enclosing large areas. These were referred to as the North pasture, the 10,000 acre pasture, etc. At times he owned substantial

### Changing Image of Grass

It is gratifying to know that the image of grasses has changed radically from pioneer days. Our remaining native prairie grasses are now judged one of our greatest resources. They not only support myriads of forms of life, stabilize soils against rain and winds, heal open wounds where grass has been exterminated by man or nature, but have given us some of our most productive soils by adding organic matter. Efforts to expand them or even to replant them are carried out with some urgency. Over a million acres of abandoned cropland has been re-seeded to native grasses in the state of Kansas alone. Our largest block of tall grass prairie is now found in the non-arable Flint Hills section of Oklahoma and Kansas. Some preserves of the original grassland, for edification of the public, have already been established and efforts are under way to expand this program. In a large measure our image of grass has come full cycle for the benefit of present and future generations.
numbers of cattle and once had some sort of partnership with the Mayfields of Powell Butte, Oregon.

His fences were built using huge 2-foot diameter pitch pine posts for braces and gates, many of which are still standing after 65 years.

The Harrison headquarters was only a half mile from the Crampton Brothers' ranch, much too close for grazing substantial numbers in competition. If Harrison had fenced his square mile directly in front of the entrance to the Crampton Ranch it would have dealt them a severe blow. Instead he chose to abandon that tract and move his houses and buildings some 7 miles northeast, in the direction of the Devil's Garden to what is now known as the Harrison Place. This is in the midst of lava flows intermingled with rock-free areas of lake bed sediments.

Harrison never married. People who knew him as a young man noted that he was painfully shy around ladies.

About 1915 a hay derrick toppled with him and broke his leg. This region is far from medical help and later the leg required amputation below the knee. His sister came from Arkansas to help him but unfortunately treated the wound with water much too hot, which damaged the nerves, making it impossible to fit him with an artificial leg. From this time on he got around with a crutch.

Harrison was good with horses. He had a devoted saddle mare and with him sitting astride, with a short length of rope and a turn around the saddle horn, they would drag objects to where he needed them. Man and horse understood each other and each worked as an extension of the other. He worked teams in his crutch days and would locate and load his wagon with his massive pitch pine logs for gate posts. Sometimes he had help but often he and his horses would accomplish tasks which would seem impossible for a man with a crutch. Seemingly he did it almost as fast as a two-legged man.

He had resolutely followed his goal but sometimes good guys finish last. He was running out of money. His big dominion was in pathetically bad shape when he started. The grass recovered slowly. The timetable he had in mind was not attainable. His vision of an infinity of vigorous grassland was not so to be. The Great Depression was the final blow.

The bank took his cattle as part payment on his loan. He sold his deeded land to Reub Long, also to apply on the loan, and moved from his isolated location in the remote rock flats to Los Angeles. There he operated a news and magazine kiosk in the heart of the city. Years later he mailed Britt Webster a $100 money order asking that $50 be paid to Art Dunn in Paisley and $50 to Cap Gibbs in Lakeview. With that, he said, all his debts from his Fort Rock days were paid in full.

Harrison appeared to have a built-in code of honor which would not allow him to exploit either land or his fellow man.

People from here who visited him in Los Angeles say that customers of his news stand were impressed. They seemed to feel that they were in the presence of a profound intellect inside a man with an unprepossessing body and a crutch.

His enormous pitch pine gate posts still delineate his former domain. However, successive operators have found that the pressure to pay bills promotes overgrazing. Since he left the land has only slightly improved; it is still mostly brush, with a little grass.

Those who remember him regard those massive gateposts as a tribute to a man of vision, intelligence, and integrity. The magnificent dream for which he devoted the good years of his life has not come about. Harrison wanted it to be mostly grass but with enough brush to shelter livestock and wildlife—just as it was in his days as Indian Agent before the homesteaders.