



Official State Historical Center of the Texas
Rangers law enforcement agency.

**The Following Article was Originally Published in the
*Texas Ranger Dispatch Magazine***

The *Texas Ranger Dispatch* was published by the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum from 2000 to 2011. It has been superseded by this online archive of Texas Ranger history.

Managing Editors

Robert Nieman 2000-2009; (b.1947-d.2009)

Byron A. Johnson 2009-2011

Publisher & Website Administrator

Byron A. Johnson 2000-2011

Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame

Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

Pam S. Baird

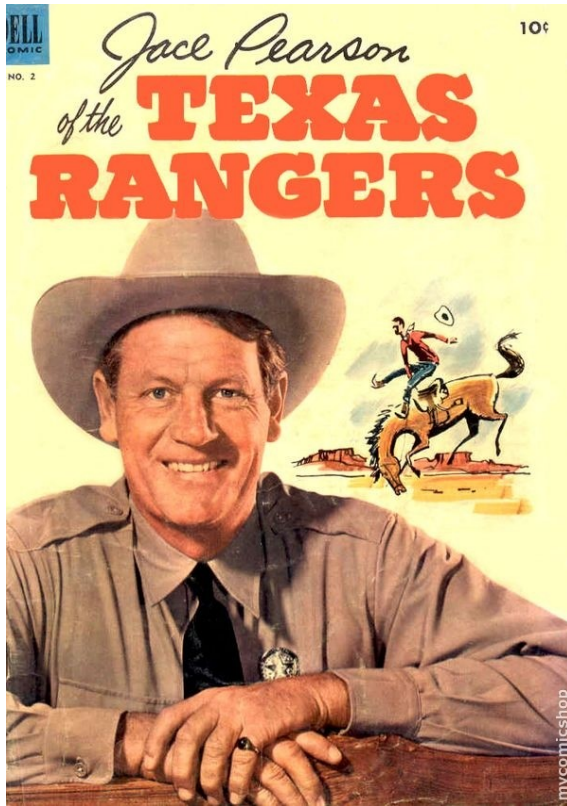


Funded in part by grants from
the Texas Ranger Association Foundation

Copyright 2017, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, Waco, TX. All rights reserved. Non-profit personal and educational use only; commercial reprinting, redistribution, reposting or charge-for-access is prohibited. For further information contact: Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum, PO Box 2570, Waco TX 76702-2570.



Tales of the Texas Rangers
by Bill O'Neal



"*Tales of the Texas Rangers, starring Joel McCrea as Ranger Pearson!*"

For more than two years, announcer Hal Gibney introduced this weekly radio show about contemporary Rangers. "*Texas! More than 260,000 square miles!*" he would continue. "And fifty men who make up the most famous and oldest law enforcement body in North America!"

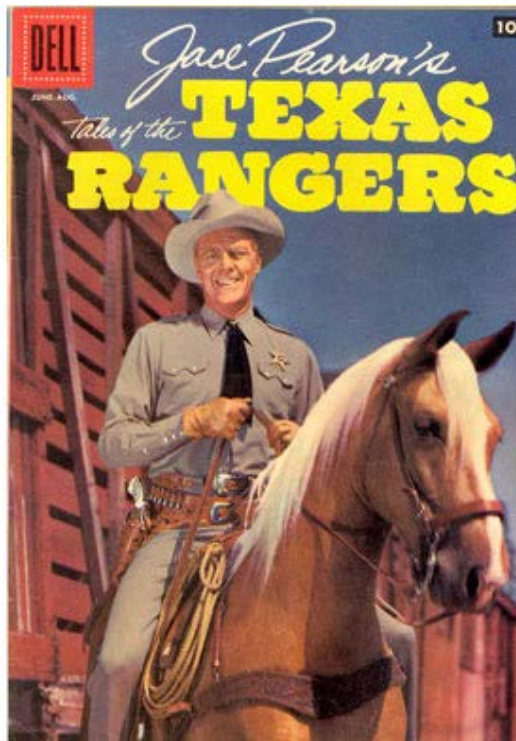
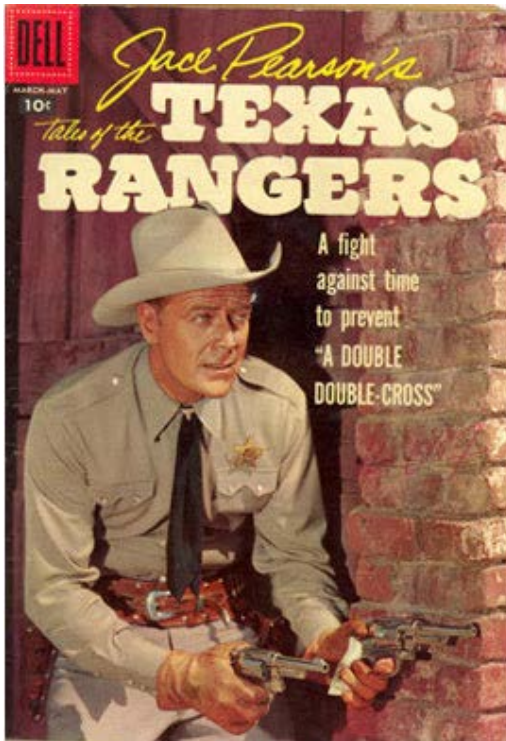
In 1950, television antennas were beginning to go up across the country, but radio networks still offered a full schedule of soap operas, game shows, mysteries, melodramas, comedies-and Westerns, such as *The Lone Ranger* and weekly series starring Roy Rogers

and Gene Autry. Western movies and novels enjoyed great popularity, so a radio series about the famed Texas Rangers was a logical concept.

Producer-director Stacy Keach (father of actor Stacy Keach, Jr.) traveled to Texas with a write to do research. Keach met one of the most famous of all Texas Rangers, Captain Manuel "Lone Wolf" Gonzauillas. Keach enlisted Captain Gonzauillas as the show's technical advisor and then traveled 1,500 miles across the Lone Star State observing the Rangers in field operations. Keach lined up an established Western star for the role of Ranger Jace Pearson. By 1950, Joel McCrea (see photo above) had been a Hollywood leading man for two decades. He was born in Los Angeles in 1905, and he went on to attend Hollywood High. In the summers, he worked at California ranches and became a superb horseman.

When he was fourteen, McCrea began appearing as an extra in silent films, including a few Westerns. McCrea was tall and ruggedly handsome, with a sense of integrity that came through on the big screen. By the 1930s, he was a leading man in comedies and dramas. In 1937, he had his first starring role in a Western, *Wells Fargo*, and two years later Cecil B. DeMille cast him in *Union*

Pacific. McCrea played the title roles in *Buffalo Bill* in 1944 and in the fourth remake of *The Virginian* in 1946. At this point, he began working almost exclusively in Westerns, starring in five in 1949.



With Joel McCrea lending star power, *Tales of the Texas Rangers* debuted over the NBC radio network on July 8, 1950. The thirty-minute show, sponsored by Wheaties, ran on Saturday nights at 9:30 for three months. In October, the show switched to Sunday evenings, eventually settling into the six o'clock time slot.

The weekly adventures were set during the past two decades in order that the show have a modern slant. Ranger Jace Pearson drove an automobile, but he had a horse trailer and sometimes galloped astride his horse Charcoal into the backcountry in pursuit of lawbreakers.

Tales of the Texas Rangers concluded its radio run on September 14, 1952. But within a few years, as Western series began to proliferate on television, *Tales of the Texas Rangers* was dusted off for TV. At first intended for juvenile audiences, a *Tales of the Texas Rangers* theme song was recorded by Shorty Long for RCA's Children's Bluebird Records. This theme song proclaimed the Rangers to be "a band of sturdy men." *Tales of the Texas Rangers* comic book was also published.

Joel McCrea, still a popular movie star, was not available for a juvenile TV series. Tall Willard Parker assumed the role of Jace Pearson, while co-star

Harry Lauter played Ranger Clay Morgan.

From 1955 through 1958, *Tales of the Texas Rangers* was aired in the afternoons over CBS-TV. In the fall of 1958, ABC-TV picked up the half-hour show, running it at five o'clock on Thursday afternoons. But by this time, Westerns had reached a peak of popularity on primetime television. So on December 22, 1958, ABC moved *Tales of the Texas Ranger* to 7:30 on Monday evenings.

Unlike the radio version, television episodes alternated between the 1950s and frontier Texas. But Parker and Lauter could not carry the show in primetime. *Tales of the Texas Rangers* was cancelled after the May 25, 1959, episode.

This writer, however, still harbors fond memories of listening to the warm, reassuring voice of Joel McCrea as he drove across the Texas of my boyhood, often stopping his car to saddle up Charcoal. Note: *For trivia fans, Charcoal was also the name of Lone Wolf Gonzauillas' horse.*



Bill O'Neal first researched Jack Hays for his 1991 book, *Fighting Men of the Indian Wars*. Bill is the author of more than twenty books and three hundred articles and book reviews. He has appeared in televised documentaries about the West on The Learning Channel, TNN, and TBS. Bill teaches history at Panola College in Carthage, Texas, and recently he was awarded a Piper Professorship.

