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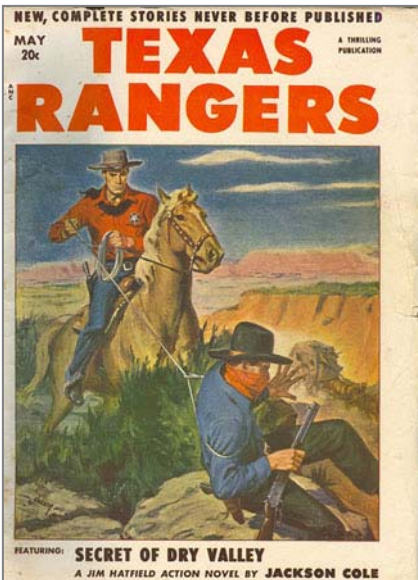
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# Trackdown

## *On the Twisting Trail of Elusive Texas Ranger Pop Culture Artifacts*

By James J. Griffin  
author of the *Jim Blawczyk, Texas Ranger* novels

*All photos courtesy of James J. Griffin*

Like most kids growing up in the mid-1950s, I spent hours on end playing cowboys with my friends. When I wasn't pretending to be cowboys, I was watching them on television: Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, the Lone Ranger, Hopalong Cassidy, and the Cisco Kid. I watched them all, but my favorite cowboy show—the one I would never miss—was *Tales of the Texas Rangers*. There was just something about Rangers Jace Pearson and Clay Morgan that captured my youthful imagination. I collected the Dell comic books series, *Tales of the Texas Rangers*, which was based on the show. When my cousin got a Texas Ranger cap pistol before I did, I was beside myself with envy. Once I'd discovered the Rangers, I never wanted to be one of the bad guys whenever my friends and I played cowboys. Heck, I didn't even covet the role of sheriff. I only wanted to be the ultimate western hero—a Texas Ranger. While I might have gotten gunned down by the bad guys many times in the course of a day's play, by the time suppertime rolled around, I'd captured or killed every one of those low-down outlaws just like those Rangers on TV.

Of course, childhood always gives way to adolescence. My fascination with the Texas Rangers waned, taking a back seat to the concerns of high school and then college. My toy guns and Texas Rangers comic books eventually ended up lost somewhere along the way. In the era of Vietnam, somehow the heroes of my youth seemed less important. Still, my interest in the Rangers was always just below the surface, and I read any article about them I happened to come across. During my junior year in college, I bought my first horse, a pinto named Sam, and I was back in the days of my childhood. I was a Texas Ranger riding tall in the saddle as that old horse and I raced through the woods and fields. When I moved to San Diego, California, Sam came along with me. One of the highlights of our journey west was driving across Texas. The trip across the Lone Star State included an overnight stay just outside of Midland. There, I got to ride my trusty pinto over the sandy soil and along the mesas of west Texas, just like the Rangers of old.



Several years after graduating from college, I took a job with a firm and remained there for quite a few years. Just down the road from my office was a bookstore that specialized in used paperbacks for twenty-five cents apiece. The store had quite a stock of westerns, especially Popular Library books featuring a Texas Ranger named Jim Hatfield. I grabbed every one of those I could get my hands on. Sure, a lot of the stories were clichéd, and the inconsistencies from one book to the next were amazing. Nevertheless, Jim Hatfield was a true hero, a Ranger who always came through and defeated the outlaws.

For quite a few years, my collecting of Texas Ranger-related items was limited to paperback books and novels. Then in 1991, *Walker, Texas Ranger*, made its television debut. At last, after years of absence from the mass media, the Rangers were on the small screen once again. While the show had little basis in reality, and the Walker character was hardly the true image of a Texas Ranger, Walker stood for right and took no nonsense from the bad guys, just like the heroes of my youth.

*Walker, Texas Ranger*, unexpectedly sent my search for Ranger-related, popular-culture artifacts into high gear. In the first few seasons of the series, Walker was more of a cowboy type and less of an urban detective. He had a spectacularly beautiful American paint horse named Amigo, who suddenly disappeared. As a longtime paint horse owner myself (my current mount is a chestnut paint gelding named Yankee), I was curious as to what had happened to that gorgeous animal. Since I'd finally been dragged kicking and screaming into the computer age by 1999, I decided to use that confounded new contraption to see if I could find out Amigo's fate. Not even knowing where to begin, I logged in with a couple of online forums dedicated to the Walker show. It didn't take long to find out that the horse that portrayed Amigo had tragically died of colic. My horse Sizzle, Yankee's predecessor, had also succumbed to that illness.

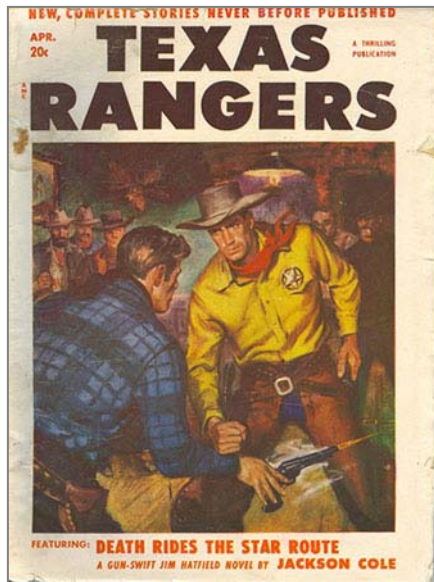
While I was messaging with one forum, I mentioned that I would like to track down copies of the Dell comic books, *Tales of the Texas Rangers*, which were based on the 1940s radio and 1950s television shows. I'd had most of those comics as a kid, but of course they'd been lost or discarded over the years. As it turned out, one of the forum's members ran a used comic book store, and she had a couple issues of *Tales of the Texas Rangers*. She also mentioned that the best source to find the others would be eBay. I purchased the issues she had, and then I turned to the giant auction site.

I had no idea what I was getting into that fateful night I went to eBay and clicked on "Texas Rangers." Besides the comics I was seeking, there were several listings for *Texas Rangers* magazine, featuring Ranger Jim Hatfield. For the first time, I had discovered the western pulp. Naturally, I had to have a few copies. My first few bids on eBay were successful, and it was with great anticipation that I awaited the arrival of the first *Texas Rangers* magazines in my mailbox. When they came, I could hardly wait to rip open the packages and once again delve into the adventures of Texas Ranger Jim

Hatfield. After reading the first few Hatfield stories, I realized the Popular Library paperbacks I'd purchased years before were, in fact, reprints of the pulp stories.

Once I was finished with those first few pulps, I had to have more. In fact, I was determined to find out how many issues of *Texas Rangers* had been published and to track down each and every one of them. A monster had been created. Once I learned there were 206 issues of the magazine published in all, the hunt was on in earnest.

When I began the search, little did I know where it would lead me. Besides the 206



issues of *Texas Rangers* I was seeking, there were all sorts of other Ranger memorabilia and artifacts up for auction on eBay. The very few genuine items even available were way out of affordability. By default, I decided to concentrate on items that reflected the image of the Ranger in the mindset of the general public. These were the popular culture items that so many people were familiar with. Naturally, my main focus was in finding all the issues of *Texas Rangers*. As I would learn, these started with the issue of October 1936 and ended with the final copy of February 1958. I also went after any other item I could afford to bid on. I especially wanted anything related to the old *Tales of the Texas Rangers* television series, my favorite childhood television show. There were candy boxes, coloring books, toy badges, games, and puzzles that I had never known existed, all of which had been tied in

with the show. Best of all, there were also videos available. Of course, I was now on the trail of *all* of the Dell *Tales of the Texas Rangers* comics, not just the ones I'd had when I was a kid.

At first, finding issues of *Texas Rangers* at reasonable prices was fairly easy. After a while, however, it became apparent that quite a few issues were very rare, and obtaining them would take much searching and more money than I had originally planned to spend. The October 1936, volume one, number one, was obviously a much sought-after copy. More of a mystery was the November 1949 issue, which always went for quite a few dollars. It took me several frustrating tries before I finally won a copy. Now, November 1949 just happens to be the month and year I was born. By some weird coincidence, the Jim Hatfield story in that issue is "Guns of Fort Griffin," and Griffin is my last name! I like to claim that connection is the reason for the November 1949 *Texas Rangers* being so valuable. However, the truth is that there is a short story in that issue written under the pseudonym W.R. Colt, who in actuality is L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology. Whenever anything by him becomes available, many of the Scientologists try and scoop it up. Therefore, that is the real explanation of



what drives the November 1949 *Texas Rangers* price sky-high. Other issues of *Texas Rangers* have short stories by Louis L'Amour, making those copies highly sought-after. The articles are listed under either his own name or the pseudonym Jim Mayo. Some of the issues have stories by Sam Brant, another popular writer.

Gradually, I was closing in on my goal of owning all 206 issues of *Texas Rangers*. By the middle of 2000, I had obtained more than half of them. It was also in 2000 that the first and most unexpected twist in my collecting happened. I had occasionally been bidding against an individual whose eBay identity was "Ranger's Wife." The items we were both seeking weren't *Texas Rangers* pulps but were mainly old postcards and other ephemera. Therefore, I didn't bid very high, so she always won. Then came the day when "Ranger's Wife" listed several issues of *Texas Rangers* that I needed. I bid on them and won. When I emailed her to finalize the sale, I asked if she were indeed married to a Texas Ranger—not a baseball player but one of the lawmen. I received a reply back within minutes saying, "Yes, she is, and this is the Ranger, not the wife!" Oops! Just what I needed: a Ranger now on my trail who thought I was after his wife.

However, that first awkward communication introduced me to Texas Ranger Jim Huggins, who is attached to Company F in Waco. For someone who has had a deep interest in the Rangers since childhood, this was the ultimate thrill for me. Jim and I have become friends since then. I've even visited him and his family in their home town of Centerville, where I was privileged to see his Ranger office. Jim has helped me with technical information for my *Jim Blawczyk, Texas Ranger* novels, and I've written him into the books—as a Texas Ranger character, naturally. We've also got a food exchange going. Jim sends me Texas foodstuffs like barbeque sauce while I, in turn, mail him items like New Hampshire maple syrup. Jim has also presented me with some hard-to-find Ranger items. When I visited the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum for the first time in 2001, my friendship with Jim also got me an invitation to visit Company F Headquarters. I'm going to take this opportunity to thank Jim for his friendship and assistance. He's a great guy with a wonderfully dry sense of humor, and he is definitely everything I had pictured a Texas Ranger to be.

Over the next several years, I gradually closed in on my goal of collecting every issue of *Texas Rangers* magazine. By 2004, I had 204 of the 206 issues in my possession, and I had read every one of them and filed each in order of issue dates. I also copied a few of the covers I liked most on photo paper and framed them for my walls. I even got quite a few duplicate issues for my then ten-year-old nephew Ronny, who had developed an interest in my collection. Along with the pulps and all of the Dell comics, I amassed quite a collection of other popular-culture Texas Rangers artifacts, most related to the *Tales of the Texas Rangers* television show. These items included an extremely rare and hard-to-find board game and an equally rare *Tales of the Texas Rangers* Baby Ruth candy box.



Now the questions began to form in my mind: What should I do with this collection? What would happen to it if anything should happen to me? Most likely, it would be broken up, or worse, sold for pennies at a tag sale or merely discarded as worthless. In addition, I thought that it seemed a shame for all these rare items, in many cases, to just be hidden away in file cabinets in my closet. As I considered this, it became more and more apparent that I needed to find an appropriate and permanent home for my collection. The obvious choice to me was the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco. I recalled seeing several issues of *Texas Rangers* magazine on display there during my visit in 2001. They were issues that, at that time, I didn't have and would have loved to pry from their display cases. So, in early 2005, I contacted the museum and was put in touch with Tracie Evans, collections manager. She assured me that the museum would be thrilled to have my collection. She said that it would have a permanent home where it would be safe and could be enjoyed by thousands of visitors each year. After the arrangements were made, my collection was packed up and sent off to Waco, where it arrived in February of 2005.

The arrival and display of the collection in the museum didn't end my search for more items. I especially sought the August 1937 and February 1938 issues of *Texas Rangers* magazine, which were the last two elusive copies that I'd never been able to find. In mid-2005, the August 1937 issue appeared on eBay. I won the bidding and finally owned a copy of that issue, which I then sent to the museum. In the midst of my writing this article, I saw on Ebay the February 1938 issue, which was the first copy I'd ever seen available and which some collectors have been seeking for over twenty years. I held off finishing this piece until I saw if I would win that rarest of *Texas Rangers* issues. It was a hard fight, but I was successful in the end. Once I read the issue and scanned the cover, I sent it to the museum in August of 2006, thus successfully completing the collection after seven years of searching. All 206 issues of *Texas Rangers* magazine are now in the possession of the Texas Ranger Museum.

Besides becoming friends with a genuine Texas Ranger Jim Huggins, my collecting of Ranger artifacts has led to several other rather surprising results. In the course of my searching, I joined a Yahoo egroup, Western Pulps, which is dedicated to fans and collectors of old western pulp magazines. One of the members, Al Tonik, is a dedicated collector of *Texas Rangers*, and his research proved invaluable to me. After much effort, he catalogued all of the issues, including listing the various authors who wrote Jim Hatfield stories under the "Jackson Cole" house name. (Using these multiple writers explains the amazing inconsistencies from one Hatfield story to the next. As long as the authors churned out a story in time for the next deadline, the editors evidently didn't care whether or not they wrote the Hatfield character and his horse Goldy the same from one issue to the next.)

The moderator of the Western Pulps group is author James Reasoner. He has written quite a few western novels in his own right, including the *Cody's Law* series, featuring



Texas Ranger Sam Cody. James also wrote three *Walker, Texas Ranger*, novels based on the television series. James's wife Livia is also a western author of some note, writing under her professional name, L.J. Washburn. One of her better-known westerns is the Texas Ranger novel, *Bandera Pass*. James knows that I am a horse owner. In 2002, he asked me a few questions about horses that he needed answered for one of his forthcoming westerns. In return, he promised to write me into one of his books as a Texas Ranger. Needless to say, I readily agreed. In 2003, Texas Ranger Captain Jim Griffin made his appearance in *Savannah* and *Appomattox*, the ninth and tenth volumes in James's *Civil War Battle Series*. While I will never be one in real life, in the pages of James's novels, I'm a hard-ridin', straight-shootin', no-nonsense Texas Ranger just like the heroes of my youth.

James insisted that I had the skills to write westerns, particularly Texas Ranger stories, and he kept after me to make the attempt. With his encouragement and advice, I wrote *Trouble Rides the Texas Pacific*, my first *Jim Blawczyk, Texas Ranger*, novel and had it published in 2005. When the book proved popular, I followed it up with the second and third of the *Blawczyk* series, *Border Raiders* and *Trail of the Renegade*. The fourth, *Ranger Justice*, has just been released, and a fifth, *Big Bend Death Trap*, will be coming out later this year through Condor Publishing, Inc. These are all traditional westerns featuring a strong Texas Ranger hero, Lieutenant Jim Blawczyk. *Big Bend Death Trap* will introduce a new Ranger character, Cody Havlicek.

In May of this year [2006?], I drove to Washington DC for my nephew's wedding and then went on to Texas. After calling on Ranger Jim Huggins, I again visited the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum. There I finally met Tracie Evans in person, along with Byron Johnson, the museum director. Words can't describe how thrilling it was to see quite a few of the of the Texas Rangers popular culture artifacts that I'd collected now on display and to watch visitors enjoying the exhibit. I need to thank Byron, Tracie, and the staff for their courtesy during my visit and, indeed, for their help and assistance through the entire process of having my collection transferred to the museum.

The past seven years of collecting Texas Rangers memorabilia have been challenging, exciting, sometimes frustrating, even aggravating at times, but certainly never dull. I am still constantly looking for more artifacts, which will continue to be added to the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum's collections. For those of you who have not had the chance, I urge you to stop and visit there if you are ever in the Waco area. It is well worth the visit.