

The Long, Long Road to the Great Debate

No one can accuse me of being a part of the so-called conspiracy against Glenn G. Boyer. For years I championed his cause because I thought others were not giving him a platform from which to say his piece.

And Glenn G. Boyer, who now seems to think he has been of great benefit to me these past several years, took great advantage of the platform that WOLA, primarily through my efforts, provided him. He not only spoke at WOLA's convention in Deadwood in 1994, he then rented the hall in which the convention was being held, and at night harangued the audience for several more hours.

Then WOLA included Boyer as part of an Earp discussion panel at our 1995 convention in Tucson. Roger S. Peterson, who organized and chaired that panel, discusses what Boyer did in advance of that event in a letter elsewhere in this issue. The panel was stacked in Boyer's favor with participants Gail Allen, Ben Traywick and Michael Hickey in his camp; Lee A. Silva probably was there and only lonely Jeff Morey was known to be critical of Boyer's work.

At WOLA's 1997 convention in Dodge City, Jane Candia Coleman Boyer introduced Karen Holliday Tanner; Glenn and Jane had a table there and were prominent at the annual Earpiana Gathering at that convention. All of these appearances were primarily my doing although there were others in WOLA who thought we should avoid any association with Boyer. But I thought Glenn ought to be heard.

I was even considered by many to be Glenn Boyer's toady. Whatever Glenn wanted, I made sure he got. No one, not even Glenn himself, provided him with a platform for his views longer and more effectively than I did. But in 1997, something began to happen that caused me to reassess what I was doing. I'm not sure exactly when I began to wonder if Glenn Boyer was a legitimate historian, but I was shocked when I learned that he admitted at the Dodge City convention



Casey Tefertiller

that he was Theodore Ten Eyck, the man supposedly the source for his book, *Wyatt Earp's Tombstone Vendetta*. I called Michael Hickey's office to find out if Talei Publishers, which had published the book, knew that Ten Eyck was a fictitious character.

I was told that Hickey had always thought Ten Eyck was a genuine character on which the book was based but that if he was not, the situation was not worth Hickey getting sick again.

I then called Ben Traywick, long-time Boyer friend, but all he could say was that we hadn't heard the whole story yet.

I never did hear what Ben thought the whole story was but shortly after that came the revealing interview in the *Tombstone Tumbleweed* newspaper in which Glenn said he was not a historian, but a novelist "and a damn good one." Quite obviously, Glenn did not consider the material he had written to be strictly historical.

Still, I did not think the issue of Glenn's reliability as an historian had been settled. I was uncomfortable with the notion that he had fabricated portions of his Doc Holliday booklet in order to catch those who were allegedly stealing his material.

I certainly do not believe in "artistic license," a device Glenn said he used to fabricate a source for his *Vendetta* book. Like most others involved in western history writing, I'm more concerned with disseminating information than in entertaining the public.

But the verdict was still out. I thought we might move closer to the truth if Glenn and Casey Tefertiller would debate their Earp research. Casey had emerged as Glenn's public enemy number one after Tefertiller's book, *Wyatt Earp, The Life Behind the Legend*, was published in which Casey mentions only one Boyer item. It apparently rankled Glenn that a major New York publisher put out Casey's book, something no New York publisher has done with any of Boyer's historical work.

Casey for months had been telling me how unreliable Glenn Boyer's material is and he even cited instance after instance where things just did not add up. Boyer has Josie Earp saying she was in Colorado, for example, when in fact she was in Alaska. But Boyer kept insisting that all Casey and his group wanted was access to Boyer's material which he had worked decades to assemble and he was not about to reveal it for the price of a postage stamp, as he put it. And Boyer kept saying that if he could ever get Casey to stand up in one place at one time he would make mincemeat out of him.

This went on for months. Then an opportunity arose which allowed me to propose to both that the two meet in a debate and we would see who would be making mincemeat. The WOLA board decided to hold its mid-year board meeting in Phoenix. The board typically meets all of one day and then goes to dinner at night and goes home the next day. Since we had nothing more to do that evening than eat, I suggested that we invite Glenn and Casey to our motel, provide them with a room, invite the public and see what developed. We could charge just enough to cover our expenses in doing this.

That was what I proposed to Glenn and

Casey. At first both were reluctant to do this. First Casey and then Glenn said no. Then Glenn said if Casey would do it, he would do it. I told this to Casey and he soon said he would do it. When I told this to Glenn, he said he would do it — and again reiterated that in any showdown with Casey he was sure to win.

The negotiations were considerably longer and more complex than this, but this summarizes what happened. Then a shocker. About two weeks before the debate was to be held in Phoenix, the motel sales manager called me to say they were cancelling the event. She said the motel management feared violence would occur at the debate.

I laughed, perhaps nervously, and asked who had told her that. When she was reluctant to tell me, I suggested that there was only one person in the world who would think any violence would occur at our debate: Glenn G. Boyer. She admitted that's who called her.

During the next few days, I assured the motel management that no violence was anticipated and that the debate should be held. I urged the sales manager to call the hotels where WOLA previously sponsored Boyer's appearances. I noted that at the Tucson hotel in 1995, Glenn appeared on stage with his leading opponent, Jeff Morey, and nothing untoward happened. They finally agreed that the debate could be held.

By this time, many members from as far away as England had made plans to attend the debate. I had my fingers crossed. I always believed Casey would show up; he said he would and he gave me no problems in advance of the meeting. Glenn, however, kept hedging. At one point he wanted the debate not in WOLA's motel, but in his motel where he could control things. He wanted only his own men to tape the meeting; I told him everyone was free to video or audio tape it, but WOLA, since it could not afford to tape it, would consider buying tapes of the debate from Glenn. The debate was scheduled for Saturday, January 3, 1998. I was to leave for Phoenix by plane on Thursday, January 1. I had heard from someone else that Glenn had the flu but that he was recovering. The afternoon before leaving, Glenn called. He sounded

like he was ill, but said he intended to make the debate. Instead of driving to Phoenix on Friday as he planned (and attending the WOLA board meeting on Saturday as he planned), he would drive as far as Tucson, stay the night and continue at a leisurely pace to Phoenix on Saturday. He also said that instead of a three-and-half-hour meeting, he probably would be there only an hour and a half. I told him that if he were not feeling well, the length of the session didn't matter, he could leave whenever he wanted.

Shortly after talking to me, Glenn also talked to Jim Miller, WOLA president, and told him the same thing, that he would make every effort to get to Phoenix, that he still wanted to debate Casey Tefertiller. I left for Phoenix Thursday morning believing Glenn would participate.

Friday evening I was informed by a WOLA board member who had been in touch with Glenn that he felt he was too much under the weather to come. This came as a shock, even though I should have been prepared for it. But I really believed that Glenn would attend, even if he had to come in a wheel chair. It was a tremendous disappointment that he did not.

All we could do was proceed with the meeting, since nearly everyone had arrived in Phoenix who planned to attend. In view of Glenn's failure to appear, the WOLA board decided Casey Tefertiller would have the floor to himself. To our surprise, 70 people came, a big turnout for an event that was an after-thought for our mid-year meeting. It was the first time we'd ever had an event associated with the mid-year board meeting. Because of the interest, we hope to do it every year.

However, it was not Glenn's failure to appear at the debate that led me to conclude his case — his side of the story — could not be trusted. It was what he did prior to the debate. He did everything he could to control it or cancel it. And I believe that once he found he could do neither, he decided not to come. I do not doubt that he was ill, but I believe he made the decision not to come based on other reasons.

After I returned home from the debate,

Glenn called and was in an argumentative mood. For one thing, he did not like the fact that WOLA charged his two-man video crew the \$10 per person admittance fee. He didn't like other things as well. And he and his supporters began an immediate damage-control campaign which included one-sided stories on the Internet, letters to publications, calls and letters to WOLA board members and more. Almost all of this was directed at me. In those stories, e-mails, letters, etc., Glenn made several very personal accusations against me, the kind of mud-slinging you usually do not see among western historians.

It is tempting to answer him, to fight back — but that would serve no purpose. Instead, my interest is in whether Glenn has been telling the truth about western history, in particular, whether he has been telling the truth about Wyatt Earp. Since I know only what I have read about Wyatt — I have done little Earp research myself — I didn't know whether Glenn's material is reliable or not. I had thought the debate would help me make that decision. Since Glenn did not appear, I had to find other ways to make up my mind.

One way would be to find someone who has studied the Earp story for decades, who has examined Boyer's writings closely and has compared his writings to the known material. Amazingly, there is just such a person in historian/author Gary L. Roberts. I have never met Gary, know little about him except that he has a book to his credit, and I did not know he had any interest in Earpiana or Boyer.

Gary previously had written an analysis of Boyer's published works and it focused on those works rather than on Boyer personally. It had never been published. I did not want a personal attack on Boyer of the same type that Boyer made on Casey Tefertiller in the guise of a book review for the last WOLA Journal. I was told Roberts' article was an effort to discover just how reliable Boyer's published material is. It was what I was looking for and I asked Gary to send it to me for possible use in the WOLA Journal. After reading it, I could not resist. It tells, in detail, what is wrong — and right — with

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Glenn Boyer's Earp writings. You will find it in this issue.

With the publication of this story, letters to the editor, and my editorial, we hope to be able to go on to other matters both in western history and in Earpiana research. If we are forced to do so, we'll address Boyer issues again, but we believe we have had our say and we are interested in much else besides what Glenn Boyer has written about Wyatt Earp. What we have done here is try to make some sense out of the intense turmoil Glenn brings to the Earp discussion. Were Glenn to disappear tomorrow, all the rancor, all the divisiveness, all the turmoil in Earp research and writing would disappear. Glenn is the sole cause of this turmoil. He has made Earp research difficult and unnecessarily stressful for everyone else. It would be best if he would leave the field and let the others do their work in peace.

But whatever he does, although it is tempting to answer his personal attacks in kind, we won't. We will focus on the truth about Wyatt Earp. That's what Gary Roberts does in this issue, that's what we will continue to do.

Historical truth is often difficult, perhaps even impossible, to arrive at. But most reasonable history buffs can recognize when an honest effort is being made to discover the truth and when