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## In Passing: Jack D. Rittenhouse, 1912-1991

David V. Holtby

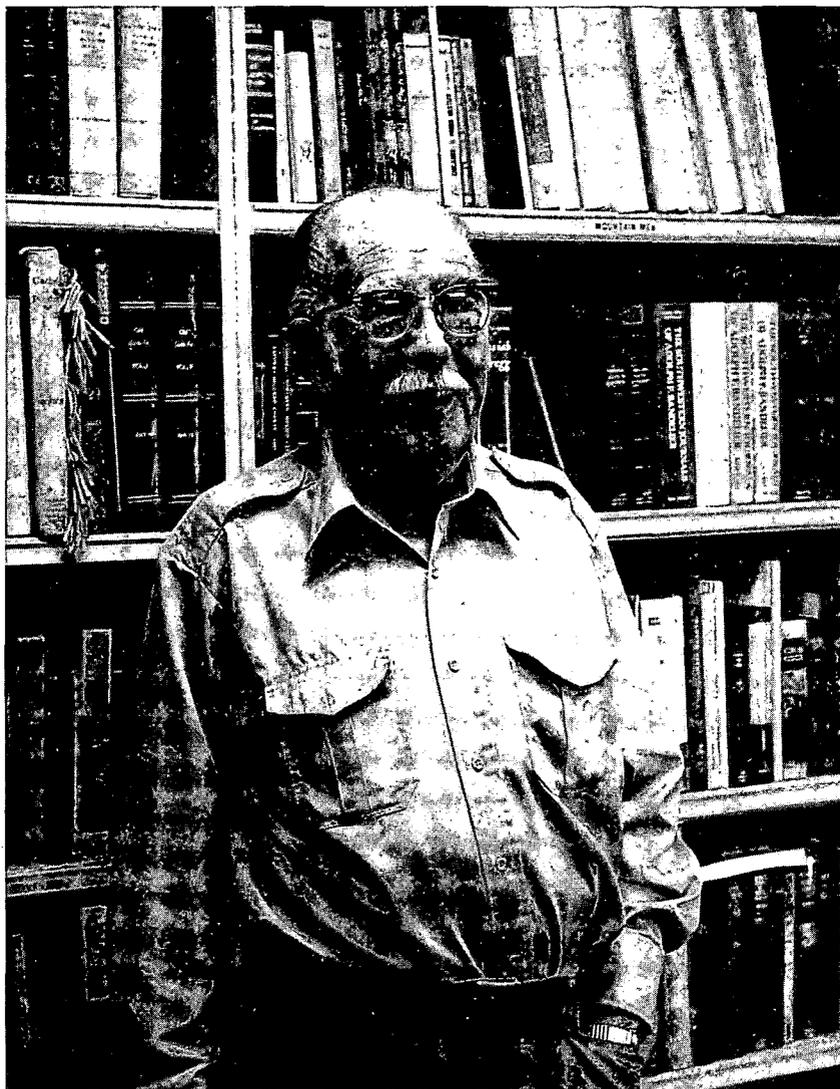
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Jack Rittenhouse, 1912–1991. Photograph courtesy of Charlotte Rittenhouse.

# In Passing: Jack D. Rittenhouse, 1912–1991

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DAVID V. HOLTBY

Jack D. Rittenhouse shared his love of western history through his writing, his publishing, and his book collecting. In all these endeavors, Jack, pipe in hand and ever the thoughtful bookman, displayed his characteristic humbleness and good humor. His openness attracted people eager to talk about books at such gatherings as Western History Association annual meetings or at Westerners Corral sessions in New Mexico. His numerous professional commitments included serving the Historical Society of New Mexico as its president from 1968 to 1972 and, in 1971, helping launch and then remaining as an officer in the New Mexico Book League and its publication, *Book Talk*, the premier book review newsletter for southwestern titles. Jack also lectured widely on a number of book-related topics, from aspects of letterpress printing, design, and binding to accounts of book searches he conducted world-wide.

Jack's family moved from Michigan to Arizona in 1916, and he claimed that he had been a westerner at heart ever since. In 1946 he self-published his first volume, *A Guide Book to Highway 66* (facsimile edition by the University of New Mexico Press, 1989). Jack became interested in bibliographic research in southwestern history in the early

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1950s while working in advertising in Texas. Over the next three decades the published results of his work included such indispensable volumes as *The Santa Fe Trail: A Historical Bibliography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971); In his two most recent books he shared some of what he had found fascinating in western lore and history: *Maverick Tales of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987) and with Tony Hillerman, *The Best of the West: An Anthology of Classic Writing from the American West* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1991).

His collaboration with Tony Hillerman is illustrative of Jack's work "behind the scenes," either as a publisher or as an editor. In both capacities he would suggest ideas for books and then recruit authors to assist in assembling the volumes. In this role Jack was the invisible hand of the publisher behind such regional favorites as *Spell of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976) edited by Tony Hillerman.

In Jack's publishing philosophy, the regional book was all-important—that is, books about where one lived. He founded Stagecoach Press, now a sought-after collector's imprint, in the 1950s as a way to publish New Mexicana, including such works of his own as *The Man Who Owned Too Much: Maxwell's Land Grant* (1958), *New Mexico's Civil War Bibliography, 1861–1865* (1961), and *Baca's Battle: Elfege Baca's Epic Gunfight* (1962). Stagecoach Press also published limited editions of books by other authors, and Jack's keen editorial sense is evident in having published Marc Simmons' first book, *Indian and Mission Affairs in New Mexico, 1773*, and David Weber's second, *The Extranjeros: Selected Documents from the Mexican Side of the Santa Fe Trail*.

As a publisher, Jack headed the Museum of New Mexico Press in the early and mid-1960s, and then served as business manager and western history editor at the University of New Mexico Press for over ten years until his retirement in 1978. The last dozen years of his life he was self-employed in Albuquerque as a rare book dealer of Western Americana and, with his usual consummate professionalism, he brought together books on the West and people seeking to read and own them.