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Spring 1998

## Review of *A Cowboy Writer in New Mexico: The Memoirs of John L. Sinclair* By John Sinclair

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Pingenot, Ben E., "Review of *A Cowboy Writer in New Mexico: The Memoirs of John L. Sinclair* By John Sinclair" (1998). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2017.

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*A Cowboy Writer in New Mexico: The Memoirs of John L. Sinclair.* By John Sinclair. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. Photographs. xvi + 128 pp. \$12.95 paper.

John Sinclair was the author of four unique grassroots novels: *In Time of Harvest*; *Death in the Claimshack*; *Cousin Drew*; and *The Night the Bear Came off the Mountain*. In addition he published numerous articles and short stories in the *New Mexico Magazine*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and other journals. Throughout all his writings runs the thread of his love of the land and the simple, earthy people native to it.

Sinclair was born in New York City in 1902. His father was the son of a wealthy and aristocratic family in northern Scotland. His Irish mother, however, was shunned by the Sinclairs who considered her socially inferior. Following his father's death and with his mother unable to care for him, young Sinclair was sent to Britain in 1912 to be reared by his grandfather and uncle. In 1923, after school-

ing and an apprenticeship in animal husbandry, he returned to the United States. The Sinclairs wanted him to establish a family-owned ranch in British Columbia, but a stop-off in New Mexico not only changed his plans, but his life. He saw saddle ponies and cowboys at the station and decided this land was the place for him. When he returned to England to tell his family he found himself disinherited.

Returning to New Mexico, Sinclair worked as a cowboy for fourteen years, all the while nurturing a growing desire to become a writer. By 1936 he had moved to Santa Fe, already well-known for its colony of artists and writers, and eventually was hired by the Museum of New Mexico to write articles on exhibits being prepared in the Palace of the Governors. This experience led to his transfer in 1940 to establish the Lincoln Museum in the old courthouse where Billy the Kid was incarcerated and from which he made his sanguinary escape. Two years later Sinclair completed his first novel, *In Time of Harvest*. From 1944 to 1963 he was superintendent of the Coronado State Monument near Bernalillo. He and his wife spent their remaining years in a nearby stone cabin with a view of the mountains. His life, he said, was like that of Thoreau, one of simplicity and solitude. His writings earned him two Western Heritage Wrangler Awards, the Western Writers' Golden Spur Award, the New Mexico Governor's Award for Excellence and Achievement in the Arts, and the Western Heritage Center's Honorary Life Membership in the Cowboy Hall of Fame.

John Sinclair was in failing health in 1988 when he began dictating his memoirs at the age of eighty-six. Recorded on tape and then typed and edited, his manuscript was completed in 1991. That year both he and his wife entered a nursing home and two years later both passed away—his wife first, Sinclair a month later. What is remarkable about these memoirs is the author's clarity of detail and wise perspective. His autobiography may be his greatest literary legacy, and readers with a

vicarious desire to experience the Southwest  
as it used to be will relish it.

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