

RUSSELL BLAINE SPAINHOWER

The following is a composite article from four sources, all of which appeared separately in our MDI Newsletters

1. *“Owen County Cousins” by Rosemary Faulk Lovell (NL1999-04)*
2. *Remembering Russell Spainhower by Peggy Spainhour Brewer (NL2009-02)*
3. *Russell B. Spainhower - Living Among the Stars by -- (NL2009-08)*
4. *Interview with Catherine Anderson (Russell’s daughter) by: Frankie Mulder (NL2014-01)*

Russell Spainhower was the second of four children of Oscar Calvin Spainhower & Mary Frances Hauser. He was born in Tobaccoville of Forsyth County, NC on 16 September 1890. In about 1903, his parents, his brother Oscar Vernon, and his sisters Nellie Leota & Myrtle Blanch, left their home in Forsyth County and settled in California on the old Carson Ranch where the city of Torrence now stands. Both sons remained in California, but after a few years (perhaps about 1910) their parents and their two sisters returned to North Carolina.

Oscar chose a career with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and soon garnered the position of chief operator. He purchased an orange grove and a home in an exclusive neighborhood with neighbors the likes of comedian Bob Hope.

In 1913 Russell married Catherine Walter of Independence, CA. A few months later, they settled in a tranquil little town north of Hollywood called Lone Pine and Russell developed the town into a virtual offshoot of the movie industry. Lone Pine is located approximately thirteen miles east of Mount Whitney. Between Lone Pine and Mount Whitney lies an area called the Alabama Hills that was a favorite shooting spot for many western movies. A skilled director could turn the Alabama Hills into any know mountain range in the world. Due to the area’s versatility, hundreds of movies were filmed in the vicinity of Lone Pine.

Farming was already diminishing as an industry here; that began when the City of Los Angeles needed water for its growing metropolis and began buying the local property and water rights. Their two daughters were born here; Catherine Joy in 1918 and Emma Jean in 1920. They lived here several years and as Los Angeles grew, Russell saw the Owens River Valley change, and perhaps that intensified his dream of having a spread of his own.

During the 1930’s Russell bought some adjoining range land from Dave Holland; named it “Anchor Ranch”; and began buying cattle.

Originally, a rancher named Al Gallaher supplied the film companies with everything from horses to cattle. Then in the early 1930’s Mr. Gallaher relocated to Callistoga and Russell Spainhower stepped in and made his livestock available for use by the filming companies.

Through the years, though continuing with the cattle business, Russell became contact-and-location man for the movies, working with such companies as Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, MGM, Universal, and many others. His opinion and judgment were highly respected by many of the old movie directors and his friendship treasured. He was also a friend of many of the old movie actors that took part in the western movies, such as the Barry brothers,

W. S. Hart, John Wayne, and others; and Russel's his home, the Anchor Ranch, can be seen as a backdrop in many westerns and even in the television series, *Bonanza*. The *Beverly and Jim Rogers Museum of Lone Pine Film History* houses props, film, and artifacts that document the 80+ years of movie history filmed in the Lone Pine area.

His invaluable knowledge of the area and his ability to make available everything from livestock to location garnered "Russ" the title of "Mr. Movies" among the locals. In some cases Russ even provided extras. Leroy Cline was seventeen when he was hired by Russ as a horse wrangler in 1930 and continued working as a wrangler for over 30 years. Russ' wife, and daughters, Jean and Joy even occasionally provided on-site schooling for children in the cast.

Russ embodied the term "jack of all trades". He nurtured the relationship between the movie industry and the town of Lone Pine. A lack of available water had resulted in a waning agricultural industry causing the local residents to view the movie business as an alternative source of income. Even town facades were modified on occasion to produce a desired backdrop. These working relationships made Lone Pine a desirable location for filming because of the reduction in costs. As an added enticement, Russ built an ol' timey western street called Anchorville on a portion of his Anchor Ranch. The movie companies paid Russ a handsome fee for use of Anchorville and for Russ' consulting role as an informal technical director.

The legendary actor John Wayne chats with his pal Russell "Russ" Spainhower on the set of "*Tycoon*" filmed in 1947.



A couple of years or so after World War II was ended, Russell & Oscar came back to North Carolina to visit the relatives. At this time, Peggy Brewer was about 10 or 12 years old and crazy about Roy Rogers. When Russell heard that he said he would send me a picture of him. I expected it to be one of the prints the studios handed out in those days. When I received it, it was a 3x5 print of Russell, the foreman of his ranch, and Roy Rogers! I was thrilled and it has always been one of the treasures of my life and 60+ years later it is still in prime condition. Every time I look at it, I think that Russell must have been a wonderful and very kind person.

In 1949 Russ Spainhower, Bruce Morgan, Henry Olivas and others assembled and trained a 20-mule team hitch for the Centennial Celebration to commemorate the Death Valley 49'ers. After the 1849 California Gold Rush established gold mines in Death Valley, the 20-mule teams became the regional standard in transportation. Russell "Russ" Spainhower was memorialized in 2007 when the Lone Pine Park and Little League Field was renamed the Russ Spainhower Park and Little League Field.

The last picture Russ Spainhower worked on was FROM HELL TO TEXAS with Don Murray. "Henry Hathaway really wanted him on that Mrs. Anderson," remembered quietly. "That was 1957, the year he died." So many years, so many films, so many friendships

A Memorial Plaque donated by the Lone Pine Film Festival, and dedicated on June 1, 1996, reads: *The story of movie-making in Lone Pine must include local rancher Russell Spainhower, who for years was Hollywood's main contact man here. "We need 50 horses and 10 wagons next week," they would say, and Spainhower would arrange it. Plus help find locations and hire local riders for the posses. In 1938 he took remnants of the Gunga Din sets and built a permanent Mission Hacienda site (later adding a western street) out at his Anchor Ranch, still operated by the family across 395 from the airport and the Best Western. The sets were seen primarily in Hopalong Cassidy and Tim Holt westerns. Spainhower whose grandchildren and great-grandchildren still live in Lone Pine, often met with the movie makers here at the DOW. "The studios really depended on him", his daughter, Joy Anderson, remembers. "They got to know him over the years, and they trusted him." That says it all.*

A Comment by James Spainhour: As a teenager I was personally well-acquainted with Russell's two sisters and their families, but knew nothing of their brothers. It was at least 35 years later when I began to assemble our MDI web site database that I learned of our relationship. Russell, Oscar, Nellie, and Myrtle were my father's first cousins!