



John Wayne

(b. May 26, 1901—d. June 11, 1979)

Born Marion Robert Morrison, his nickname Duke came about when he lived in Glendale, California in the early 1900s. He and his dog, Duke, were so inseparable they became known as Little Duke and Big Duke. The name stuck throughout his life. His stage name was changed to John Wayne in 1930 for his role in *The Big Trail*, a film that ultimately failed. But, the name remained.

Born in Winterset, Iowa in 1907 John Wayne became one of the most popular film actors of the 20th Century and remains an American icon to this day. After high school, John went to USC on a football scholarship, but when he was injured he was denied the scholarship and dropped out of school. He began his film career as a prop man and an extra; however, for more than a decade he worked largely unnoticed in B-grade movies. In 1939, he got his big break as the Ringo Kid in John Ford's classic movie, *Stagecoach*. In 1948 he starred in *Red River* as the troubled cattleman, Tom Dunson.

Wayne loved Arizona and his ties to the state went beyond the movies filmed here. In the 1950s, he purchased a feedlot in Stanfield, Arizona and in 1960 hired Louis Johnson to manage it. He named the enterprise the Red River Feedlot. In 1962, he and Johnson became partners in the Red River Land and Cattle Company, which is still operational today. They also co-owned the 26 Bar Ranch in Eagar and the John Wayne Hereford Cattle Ranch near Greer. Both took part in cattle auctions and were often seen about town in Eagar, Greer, and Casa Grande. Wayne and Johnson were known to frequent the Casa Grande Café (today's Cook-E-Jar Restaurant on 2nd Street in downtown Casa Grande).

John Wayne won many awards during his long career, but among the most prominent are the Academy Award he won in 1969 for *True Grit* and the Presidential Medal of Freedom presented to him in 1980. He was featured on U.S. postage stamps in 1990 and 2004. Within Pinal County he is remembered and honored by the John Wayne Parkway, a major street in Maricopa. Locally, John often attended functions at Francisco Grande Resort, located between Stanfield and Casa Grande. The Duke Lounge at the Resort is named after him.

After several bouts of cancer, John Wayne succumbed to the disease in 1979. In 2006, his friends, along with his former business partner, Louis Johnson, inaugurated the Louis and the Duke Classic, a week-end long event in Casa Grande. The Classic, as it is known, raises money for cancer research and includes a golf tournament and a roping contest. The popular event is well attended and John Wayne is remembered annually as a world icon, but more importantly, as a friend to Casa Grande.



To learn more about local ranchers, actors, and other prominent figures visit the Casa Grande Valley Historical Society Museum. Exhibits and collections portray the many interesting characters of Casa Grande and the surrounding region. Research materials are also available by appointment.