

## Robert M. Utley (1929- )



Robert M. Utley was one of the six founders of the Western History Association, and from 1967 to 1968 he served as its sixth president. He has enjoyed a distinguished career as a bureaucratic historian, a public historian, and an author. Utley dedicated himself to bringing the themes of American frontier and western military history to a broad audience in all these capacities.

Born in Bauxite, Arkansas, he began working with the National Park Service (NPS) in 1947 at age seventeen as a summer employee at the Custer Battlefield National Monument. His love of history took him to Purdue University, where he earned his B.A. in 1951, and to Indiana University, where he earned his M.A. in 1952. From 1952 through 1956 he served in the Army as historian for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He returned to the Santa Fe Office of the NPS in 1957 and was ultimately pro-

moted to Chief Historian of the agency in 1964. Utley remained at that post until leaving government service in 1980 to write full time.

The first of Utley's sixteen books was a short work from 1949 entitled *Custer's Last Stand*. In 2004 he released his fifteenth, *Custer and Me: A Historian's Memoir*. The monographs and articles in between earned dozens of awards, and he has yet another volume in the works. A number of his books feature the historic sites he helped preserve during his NPS years. His work in that role included delineating the course of the Butterfield Trail and planning the preserving of Fort Bowie and other notable sites.

Utley always writes "history that is methodologically sound, but history that is precise and readable." He also prepared and presented interpretative histories that had intellectual substance and exposed each topic's nuances.

### Sources:

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