

Quick, Timely Reads  
*Reading in the Time of Coronavirus*  
On the Waterfront

Straight Arrow Cards:  
*Bay Rats and Shredded Wheat*

By David Frew  
March 2021

*Dr. David Frew, a prolific writer, author, and speaker, grew up on Erie's lower west side as a proud "Bay Rat," joining neighborhood kids playing and marauding along the west bayfront. He has written for years about his beloved Presque Isle and his adventures on the Great Lakes. In this series, the JES Scholar-in-Residence takes note of life in and around the water.*

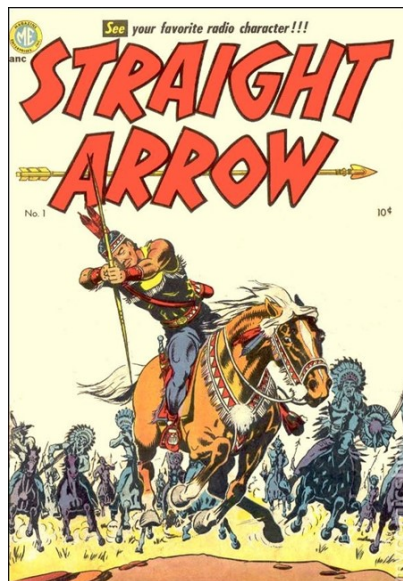


*"NABISCO,  
Nabisco is the name to know.  
For a breakfast you can't beat,  
Eat Nabisco Shredded Wheat."*

**W**hy? They tasted like straw and had the consistency of dried sticks. But many of my friends consumed them each morning and also for snacks. Adding milk and a half-cup of sugar or so made them almost palatable after they had been systematically crushed into the consistency of lawn refuse. But between

each layer of Nabisco Shredded Wheats there was divider; a piece of cardboard that separated alternative biscuits. The cardboard separators might have been about as tasty as the actual shredded wheats, but we never ate them. They were the reason why we were eating a cereal that one Nabisco rival (one of the Kellogg brothers) had characterized as “quite like eating a whisk broom.” Instead, we excitedly pulled them out of the box as soon as it was opened and collected them. They were the official “Straight-Arrow Cards,” gateway to an ideal way of life.

During the late 1940s, Nabisco (National Business Company) was trying to figure out how to enter the boxed cereal market for kids, one that was dominated by General Mills, Kellogg, and Post. After hiring a flashy New York marketing and advertising firm, they decided to use a radio program as the vehicle for a promotion. To that end, they commissioned a script writer to develop a radio series that would become the major sponsor of the drama. The script writers came up with a program called “Straight Arrow,” which revolved around the life of a Comanche baby who had been found, adopted, and raised by a Caucasian family who named the young Indian, Steve Adams. By the time the audience was introduced to Steve Adams, who was secretly Straight Arrow, he had become a successful western rancher. From time to time, however, Steve would be compelled by circumstances to switch into his secret Comanche warrior identity to solve an urgent western crime problem. Steve was always able to do this because he had a powerful genetic knowledge of the “Indian Way.”



*Kids lived for “Wooushhhh,” the exciting radio sound of an arrow heading toward its criminal target, and created by a Hammond B studio organ. Straight Arrow never missed.*

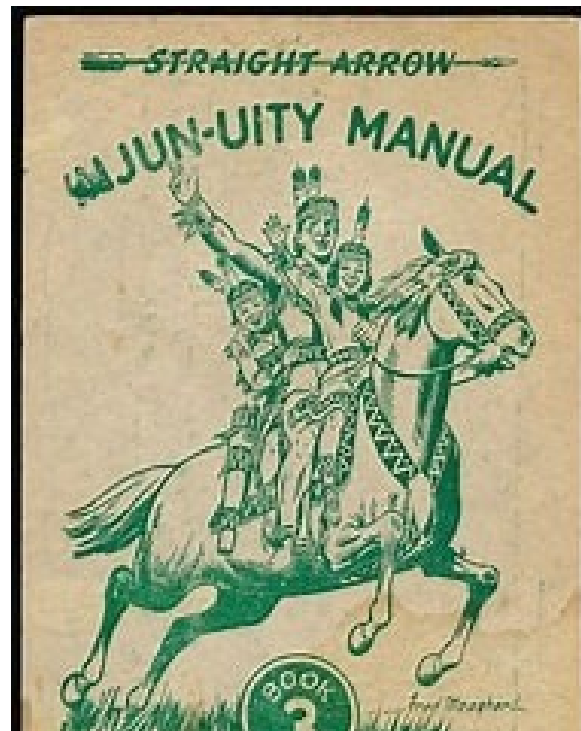
When circumstances demanded, Steve would travel to a secret cave on his Broken Bow Ranch, where he maintained a full array of Comanche equipment as well as his trusty palomino horse, Fury. The only person who knew Straight Arrow’s secret identity as well as the location of the cave was his ranch sidekick, Packy McCloud (as in Batman and Alfred, the butler). As terrible crimes emerged on the western plains, kidnappings, bank robberies and more, Steve would disappear into the secret cave, put on war paint and a headband with feathers, and then emerge on horseback with every imaginable Indian weapon. But it was usually his Indian knowledge of tracking, roping, and other trickery that was used to solve the decidedly Caucasian crime sprees.

When the series began on the radio in 1950, Nabisco ran a contest to name

Straight Arrow's horse, which featured cash prizes as well as gifts, but to enter, a prospective "name" had to be submitted on a Nabisco Shredded Wheat box top. It was genius promotional stuff aimed at boys. The radio program ran for 249 bi-weekly episodes until 1951, but unfortunately it appeared at the beginning of the television era and could not compete. The radio show was augmented by both a newspaper strip as well as a series of comic books, both of which continued for several years after the radio show had been cancelled.

For as racist as the Straight Arrow concept might seem these days, the promotion of the radio show powered the marketing of a series of shredded wheat filler cards that were promoted under the general title, "Injun-Uity." Collectable Straight Arrow cards purported to teach kids the Comanche way so that they could acquire all of the healthy living and crime-fighting skills possessed by Straight Arrow, AKA Steve Adams. He was a full-blooded Comanche, but amazingly (according to radio introductions), he was educated, articulate, and able to pass for a white man. How awful!

While Straight Arrow cards were free and included in each box of cereal, the organizing manual cards shown below were a premium product that could only be acquired by sending several box tops with a "small" amount of money to the Nabisco Company.



*One of several "Official" Straight Arrow card organizing manuals*

Naturally there was an origin story, which detailed the circumstances during which Straight Arrow was abandoned by Indian parents, found, adopted by Steve Adams' Caucasian parents, and raised as a white man on a large ranch. While the radio show's producers had planned to work the origin story, like that of the Lone Ranger, into several episodes, the radio program was cancelled before they could make that happen. Instead, they included the origin story in the system of organizing manuals. Fans had to buy several of them before they could read the entire, exciting story.



*Straight Arrow cards*

The cards were mini-instructional manuals that detailed skills that every urban kid needed to survive in the outdoors. How to build a bow and arrow set, using ordinary materials that could be found in the woods, or recognize the difference between bear tracks and mountain lion tracks, or learning to follow the trail of a bad guy through difficult terrain. By studying Straight Arrow cards, we learned to build a makeshift stretcher for dragging wounded friends out of the woods and to the “Doc.” Most important, we knew how to treat a poisonous snake bite: “You make an “X” at the wound with your hunting knife and suck the poison out.” Naturally, we were motivated to try to collect all of the cards. Otherwise, we could easily perish while wandering around the bayfront wilderness areas.



*Typical Straight Arrow cards from our shredded wheat cereal boxes*

The quirky nature of Straight Arrow and its related paraphernalia has made the cards a prized “collectable.” There are still Straight Arrow fan clubs and discussion groups. From a modern nutritional perspective, I wonder about the breakfasts that we were eating. Given modern understandings regarding the dangers of sugar, gluten, and dairy products, it seems that the typical practice of piling sugar and pouring milk on the already carbohydrate-loaded breakfast cereals that we ate to get more Straight Arrow cards may have been disastrous. In their latter-day attempts to make shredded wheat into a kid-friendly breakfast and snack item, Nabisco appears to have made matters worse by shrinking the size of the already-bad-for-us wheat pellets and adding sugar and other popular tastes, like cinnamon, strawberry, and maple syrup. Kellogg currently lists the nutritional content of a cup (most kids would eat more) of frosted, strawberry mini-wheats, with a half cup of skim milk (most kids would add more than that amount and use whole milk) as having 220 calories, which include 53 grams of carbohydrate.

**“Don’t Strike Out”**

The man who fans the air without hitting anything will soon be out of the game. Get strength for the Game of Life by eating

**SHREDDED WHEAT**

at least once a day all the year 'round. It contains all the muscle-making material in the whole wheat made digestible by steam-cooking, shredding and baking.

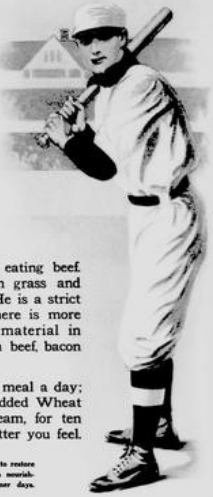
Many persons imagine they can get “strong as an ox” by eating beef. The ox gets his strength from grass and cereals. He doesn’t eat meat. He is a strict vegetarian. Pound for pound there is more muscle-making, brain-building material in Shredded Wheat Biscuit than in beef, bacon or eggs.

Confine your meat-eating to one meal a day; Cut out soggy pastries; try Shredded Wheat for breakfast, with milk or cream, for ten mornings and see how much better you feel.

Shredded Wheat Biscuit, (baked in the oven to restore crispness) with sliced peaches and cream, is a nourishing and wholesome dish for the hot Summer days.

All the Meat of the Golden Wheat

MADE BY  
THE SHREDDED WHEAT COMPANY, Niagara Falls, N. Y.



*The original Shredded Wheat Company was located in Niagara Falls, New York but moved to Naperille, Illinois after Nabsico purchased it.*



*The modern, kid-friendly version of shredded wheat – same wheat, more sugar*

Years later, a successful television franchise starring Chuck Norris began to enjoy exceptional ratings. “Walker Texas Ranger” appeared as the newest media hero, acting quite like the cowboy heroes of the 1950s, even though his drama was set in contemporary times. Instead of being an Indian action hero who was raised as a white person, Walker was a white person raised and influenced by Indians. He seemed to be a clever amalgamation of Straight Arrow and the Lone Ranger. Walker was gifted with Indian knowledge, including uncanny ability as both a tracker and a broker of natural phenomena, combined with a sophisticated understanding of the modern world. He could ride a horse, but he also drove a four-wheel drive, jacked up Dodge truck. In addition to being a skilled marksman with both a service revolver and other more powerful weapons, Walker was a champion martial artist who often subdued bad guys with spinning kicks and other amazing physical maneuvers. Why arrest a bad guy the regular way, by simply holding him at bay with a weapon while handcuffing him (or them), when Walker could engage the bad guys in a fair fight and easily defeat them? In addition to his heroic attributes, Walker Texas Ranger was a “straight-arrow” in the common vernacular sense; a virtuous man who always endeavored to do the

right thing. Regardless of circumstances, for example, Walker always stopped to fasten his seat belt before beginning a car chase.

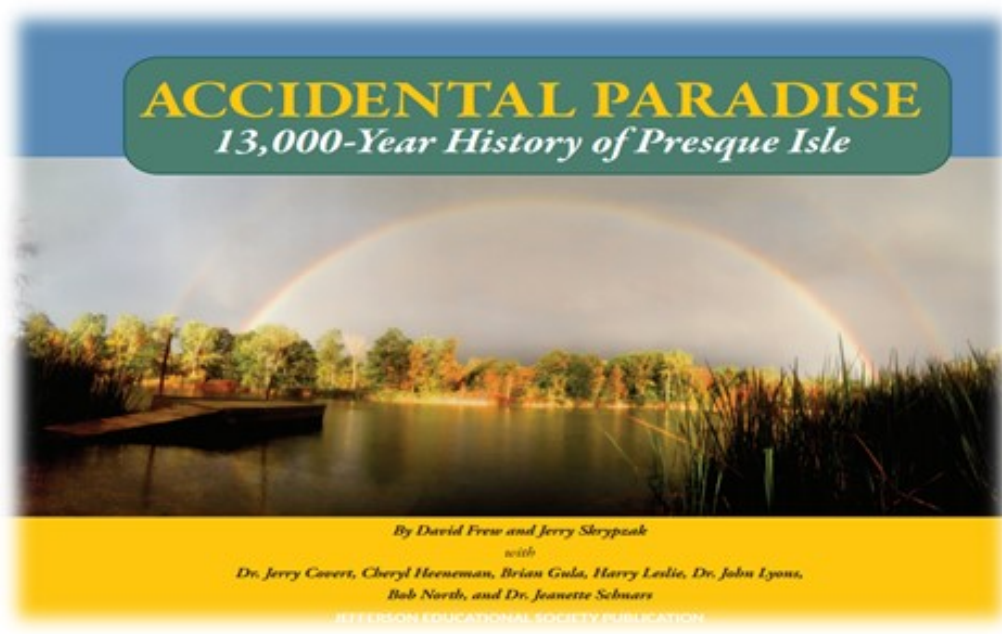
Were the writers of this series as well as Chuck Norris, himself, influenced by 1950s radio dramas? Norris was the right age. I suspect that imbedded memories of Straight Arrow and the Lone Ranger have influenced the ways that those writers imagined superheroes. An urban philosopher once asked:

“Who among us can honestly say that his or her life was not changed by watching an episode of Walker Texas Ranger?”

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## Accidental Paradise Available at TRECF

*Accidental Paradise*  
by Dr. David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak



The much-anticipated new book on Presque Isle by authors David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak – “**Accidental Paradise: 13,000-Year History of Presque Isle**” is on sale at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center’s gift shop and through a special website, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

The book, priced at **\$35 plus tax and shipping**, can be ordered now through the website sponsored by the TREC Foundation, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

Presque Isle Gallery and Gifts on the main floor of TREC, located at 301 Peninsula Drive, Suite #2, Erie, PA 16505 will also handle sales *Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

For more information, send an email to [aperino@TRECF.org](mailto:aperino@TRECF.org).

To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.*



## In Case You Missed It

[Alone Together Part One](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence Dr. Andrew Roth

[Air Raids and Bomb Shelters 'Wholesome' Childhood Images and Bad Dreams from the 1950s](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence Dr. David Frew.

