Author’s Note

If you want to learn how much you can overlook or forget, just write a book.

—Henry A. Pilsbry, The Nautilus, 1949

This homely truth is greatly magnified when you spend forty years writing a book without knowing that’s what you’re doing. You, the reader, have seen how a genetic accident handed this story to me on a silver platter and how I then coasted along on a serendipitous current of secondhand knowledge. I had a free ride, effortlessly acquiring the memories of my family, borrowing from the experience of river runners, and carelessly absorbing some of the expertise of Grand Canyon historians, all without firsthand responsibility. Participating in a three-way book with gentlemen vastly more knowledgeable than me meant I did not have to bother with such tedious activities as in-depth research and literary citations; I could leave it all up to them. I simply kept my little mountain of data in its haphazard order (surely an oxymoron, but in this case . . .) and enjoyed it for the gift it was. When I finally faced the reality of going it alone on this book, all those things I neglected so long ago came home to haunt me. I dismantled my mountain and reassembled it, and soldiered on, rediscovering along the way those who had provided my free ride. It is time to pay for my passage.

From the dim past, then, my first debt must be to my mother whose exceptional memory and tidy way with old letters and documents laid a firm foundation for the history of her father, and to my aunts and
uncles whose recollections, once untangled, were so valuable. And of course to James White himself, whose survival made my life possible.

I owe another major debt to that remarkable gentleman, Otis “Dock” Marston, who, as you have seen, was the initiator and catalyst of this book. Were he alive today, he would denounce my arguments and conclusions, but such disagreement could not diminish his generosity with the time, energy, and affection he gave me over a twenty year period—a truly priceless gift.

This book is, in a way, a memorial to those long gone. If there is a Library in the Sky, I hope it will stock a copy or two for them.

Less distant is my good friend and once-collaborator, Robert C. Euler, whose scientific objectivity, integrity, and professionalism is evident in the book, and whose amazing detective work uncovered the magic needle of Moqui Canyon in the desert haystack.

Close to home is my immediate family. I once tried to persuade my son, Greg, to take over the project when it looked to be too much for me, but he told me that, after all those years of work, it had to be my book and then kept reminding me “You can do it, Mom.” My daughter-in-law, Patti, and my granddaughter, Lauren, added their faith and encouragement. But most of all, I owe a huge debt to my husband and friend, Bob Adams. Without his unfailing, active, and generous participation in a thousand valuable ways, including the most difficult and tedious one of all—pushing me when I faltered, and that was often—I could never have completed the job. There are not enough words in any language to thank them.

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Many books and articles have made valuable contributions to the emerging picture of James White, his detractors, and his supporters, as well as the long-running controversy over him; however, there have been a host of substantive errors in the telling. I cannot think that I have escaped a similar fate, but while the flaws you may have found here are certainly mine, they are as unintentional as White’s “passage through the Great Cañon of the Colorado of the West.”