

## 2018 Most Honored Packer

## DENNIS WINCHESTER

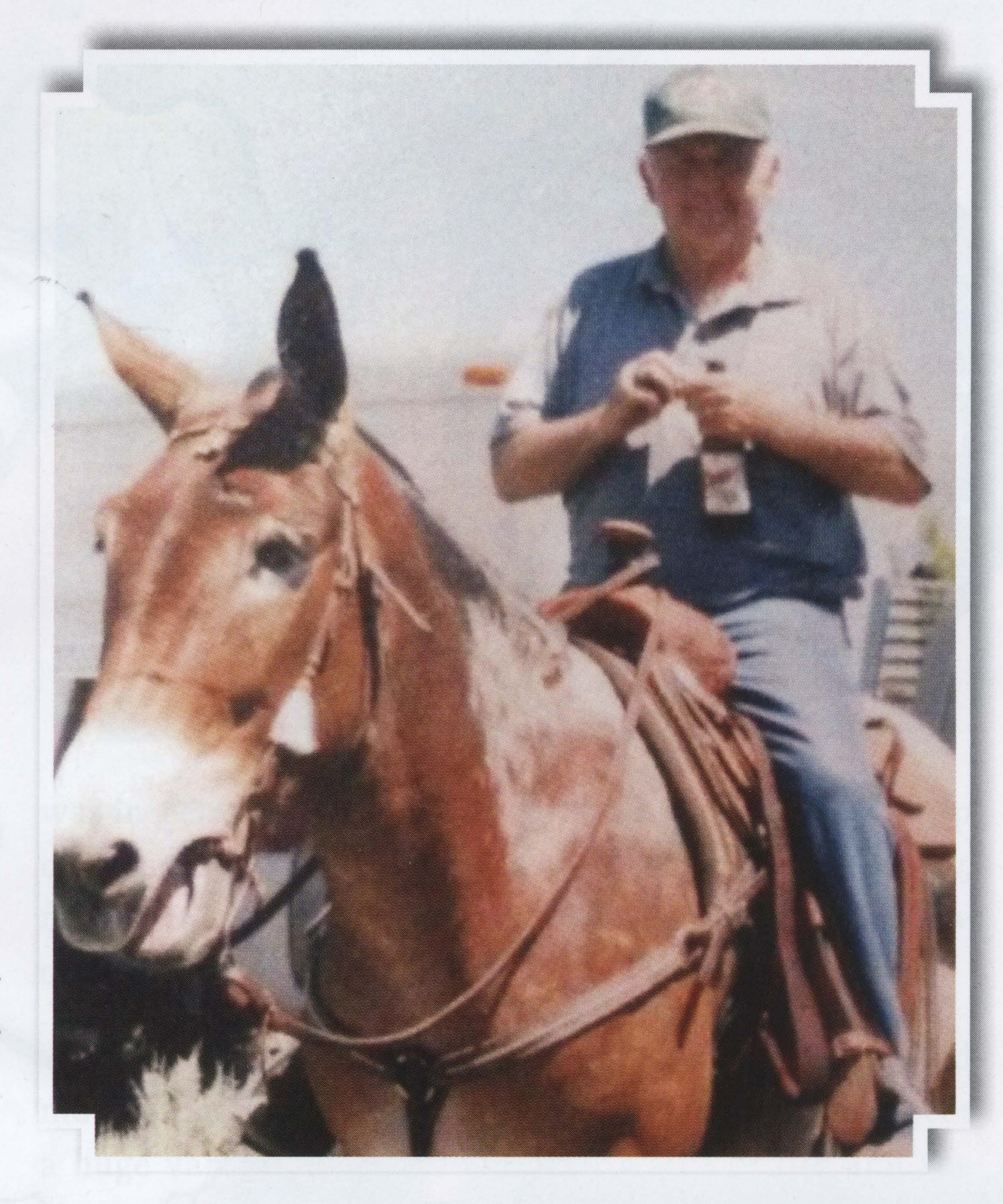
by Aleta London

ust the name Dennis Winchester is enough to elicit a smile from anyone who knows him. A teller of tall tales, a regaler of adventures, a huge exaggerator with enormous humor, that is Dennis. However, underneath that jovial exterior is an exceptional man with vast experience dealing with horses, mules, and the Sierra backcountry.

His early years were spent at a succession of family owned and operated stables in the San Fernando Valley, but by his teens he had discovered the Eastern Sierra. From the age of fourteen, he spent summers working for pack stations ranging from Little Antelope in the north to Cottonwood in the south.

After brief stints working with horses in movie productions, and even managing a bar, Dennis returned to Cottonwood Pack Station where he was hired by Bob Moore and ended up buying the outfit about 1971. The horses and mules of the early times were not the gentle, easy-going animals of today. Instead, Dennis says that "You didn't ever fall asleep in the saddle on those long days, because either your horse would come apart or your string of mules would create a wreck, so it was essential to stay alert at all times."

Dennis thrived on the challenges that packing posed and had a great time. He loves the Sierra backcountry, he met many wonderful people over the years, and he truly loves his animals. He admits with a chuckle, "It isn't good to be in the livestock business if you are like Tomi (his wife) and me, and get way too fond of your animals. They become your children, and you love them, and it is heartbreaking when



you have to say goodbye."

Dennis is the natural choice for the Most Honored Packer 2018, since he has been packing mules and horses all over the Eastern Sierra for so many decades. Folks who are lucky enough to know him appreciate not only his knowledge and experience, but above all, his very infectious personality and sense of humor. He is truly one of a kind and deserves to be honored by Mule Days for all he has done to sustain and promote the packing industry.