Old Mount Franklin

Excerpt from the program
“Look to the Mountain”
a telecast presented annually
on Channel 9 KTSM-TV by the
El Paso Electric Company

Tom Lea
OLD MOUNT FRANKLIN

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I first wrote this in order to speak it on a radio broadcast in December of 1951. Two years later I revised it a little, to accommodate the speaking to the requirements of television cameras which had joined the microphones at KTSM. Since then the words here written seem to have become an invariable part of an annual ceremony, an affectionate salute repeated each year, spoken in a December dusk when a star is lighted on a mountainside and Christmastime comes again at the Pass of the North.

TOM LEA
OLD MOUNT FRANKLIN is not a part of any fabled range of Delectable Mountains graced with green trees and softened by the fertile rain.

Mount Franklin is a gaunt hardrock mountain, standing against the sky like a piece of the world's uncovered carcass.

Mount Franklin is a ridge of rock rising like a ragged wall along the flank of a desert river.

The shape of Mount Franklin is a jumbled set of wedged pyramids, broken and interlocked, buttressed and bastioned together in a massive long line of heights and hogbacks.
Mount Franklin is built of humped twists and folds of mother rock, laced and interleaved with a little thin soil, pushed up in some primal birthpain of the earth, and then tilted above the desert’s floor.

The plants that grow along Mount Franklin’s slopes are tough plants, with thirsty roots and meager leaves and sharp thorns that neither hide nor cover the mountain’s rough rock face. Mount Franklin is a lasting piece of our planet, unadorned.

The bulk and substance of it stand changeless, immortal to our mortal eyes. Yet the color of Mount
Franklin is as various, as transient, as its shape is eternal. Let your eye follow the speckled sandy fold and slope of the hills to the level lines of the mesa tops, up the ridges, along the mountainsides, to where the bare rock stands faintly stained with red of iron, touched with subtle ochre, ribbed with rich blue of shadow, paled with high blue of distance. In the air of the desert, sun and shadow and cloud and haze change the monotone of tawny tan ground and gray rock into bluing hues of an infinite subtlety, as if soil and stone might borrow the magic airiness of the sky.
Under the journey of the sun whose shifting slants of light are never still, whose slowly shortening and lengthening shadows are always various, the passage of each moment of time casts its own color upon the mountain's face. The hours write upon it with light and space in an evanescent hand, from the first reaching sunrays pink on the summit stones lifting from deeps of shadow, to the flat and formless glare of noon glittering on the grain of granite and hot in the dust, to the last glow of cloudlight touching down at day's end upon darkening slopes. Above the black loom of Mount Franklin at night, the stars wheel the never pausing mark of time.
The seasons touch at the mountain’s rigid face. Spring winds make a brown ghost of Mount Franklin under the gritty amber of the sand-filled sky. Summer rain brings a burgeoning green velvet fuzz along the rounded tilt of the sun-worn slopes. Autumn haze shrouds Mount Franklin’s feet and touches canyons with a blue and violet mystery. Winter snow traces with a delicate white the lift and turn of the ridges.

Above the Rio Grande’s ribbon of green, forming one side of the portal of the Pass of the North, Mount Franklin is a presence and a personality. Standing above us, above the build of our town, Mount Franklin is the landmark and the trademark of where we live.
And it is more.

“A mountain,” Carl Sandburg said, “is something that’s fastened down, something you can count on.” By that token, a mountain is a talisman in our hearts. In looking at Mount Franklin, up there, we lift our eyes toward the sky.
THIS EDITION OF
OLD MOUNT FRANKLIN
was originally composed of 300 copies only,
printed and bound for Sarah and Tom Lea
as a Christmas greeting to friends.

Produced by
CARL HERTZOG
El Paso