



History of Television's the Virginian 1962-1971

Paul Green

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On September 19, 1962, *The Virginian* made its primetime broadcast premiere. Based on the 1902 novel by Owen Wister, *The Virginian* had already been through four movie adaptations when Frank Price mentioned the story's series potential to NBC. In need of a western to compete for the genre's huge audience share, the network gambled money and resources on Price's recommendation. Filmed exclusively in color, *The Virginian* became TV's first 90-minute western series. By 1967, the show had broken into the Nielsen ratings top ten, and NBC's gamble had paid off. Immensely successful (in spite of a rough fourth season which almost spelled the end for the series), *The Virginian* ran for nine seasons, becoming television's third longest running western. This work documents the creative history of *The Virginian*. It investigates the original inspirations for the main character and follows the story through various motion picture adaptations. The primary focus, however, is *The Virginian*'s transformation into television. Personal interviews with executive producer Frank Price and actors, James Drury, Gary Clarke, Roberta Shore, Randy Boone, Sara Lane and Pippa Scott provide insider details. The book also looks at the ways in which the show changed over time. An extensive episode guide includes title, air date, guest star(s), writers, producers, director and a brief synopsis of each of *The Virginian*'s 249 episodes along with a detailed list of cast and production staff. An appendix provides a cross-section of collectibles available from internet auction sites and memorabilia dealers.

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