

Myth #132: Actor Who Killed John Wayne Married in Carson City by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

I would like audiences to remember I had game. Bruce Dern, *Things I've Said, But Probably Shouldn't Have* (2007)

Actor Bruce Dern and I worked together in a PBS documentary on Lake Tahoe environmental issues, *The Fate of the Jewel* (2001). That's when I learned he married his current wife in Carson City.

You may remember Dern as the bad guy who killed John Wayne in *The Cowboys* (1972), or, perhaps you recall his Oscar-nominated performance with Academy Award winners Jane Fonda and Jon Voight in *Coming Home* (1978). His acting career dates back to the late 1950s and includes hundreds of plays, movies and TV productions. His memoir, *Things I've Said, But Probably Shouldn't Have*, was published in 2007.

Prior to videotaping the Lake Tahoe production at Stateline's Edgewood Country Club, Dern shared that his grandfather, George H. Dern, had been a Utah governor and President Franklin Roosevelt's first Secretary of War; that his godmother was Eleanor Roosevelt and his godfather was Adlai Stevenson; and that his uncle was the Pulitzer-prize winning poet/playwright and Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish.

Dern then asked me where I lived. I replied Carson City. Was I surprised when Dern told me that his buddy Elliott Gould and Barbra Streisand married in the state capital, and, so did he.

Dern married Andrea Beckett in 1969. He had recently divorced second wife actress Diane Ladd, the mother of Laura Dern (Laura is a successful actress in her own right and the apple of her father's eye). The marriage license application noted that Bruce M. Dern, 33, of Santa Monica, California, was divorced on September 18, 1969. While Beckett, a fledging actress also from Santa Monica, used her maiden name as her stage name, the 28-year-old widow signed the application with her married name, Andrea R. Kermott. Justice of the Peace Pete Supera, who had presided over the Gould-Streisand wedding six years earlier, conducted the ceremony for Dern and Beckett on October 20.

"Andrea and I had been living together about four months, and we decided we wanted to get married," Dern writes in his memoirs. He noted that the money he earned from acting in the B-horror--he called it a Z-horror--film *The Incredible Two-Headed Transplant* paid for the wedding. "Andrea won't have a shot of any kind, so we wanted to get married in Nevada because they don't require blood tests there. We were going to Tahoe in October after I'd run in the American Fifty Mile Championship at Rocklin outside of Sacramento."

NO 743
Affidavit of Application for Marriage License
STATE OF NEVADA
CARSON CITY

Every day since 1969:
My Name is Bruce M. Dern
I am 33 years of age
I reside in the City of Santa Monica
County of Santa Monica
State of California
Previously married Yes Wife divorced
Divorced Yes When 9-18-69
Where Santa Monica
On what grounds I, the Plaintiff
I desire a license to authorize my marriage with
Andrea R. Kermott
My age is 28 years
and residing in the City of Santa Monica
County of Santa Monica
State of California
Previously married Yes Husband deceased
Divorced Yes
Where Santa Monica
On what grounds I know of no legal objection to our marriage.
I hereby certify that the foregoing statements are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
Signed and authorized before me on this 20th day of October 1969.
Pete Supera Justice of the Peace
City of Carson City, Nevada
Licenses issued by the State of Nevada A.D. 1969

Dern was a world class runner and ran track for the University of Pennsylvania before quitting school to join the prestigious Actor's Studio in New York City in 1958. He received training from Lee Strasberg and Elia Kazan who remained his friends throughout their lives.

Dern also enjoyed a good working relationship with director Alfred Hitchcock appearing in two of Alfred Hitchcock Hour TV episodes, the motion picture *Marnie* (1964), and starring in *Family Plot* (1976).

His lead role in *Silent Running* (1972) was a major boost to his career. He also appeared in such noteworthy movies as *They Shoot Horses Don't They?* (1969), *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972) with long-time friend Jack Nicholson, *The Great Gatsby* (1974), *Black Sunday* (1977), and, more recently, *Monster* (2003) with Oscar-winner Charlize Theron.

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STATE OF NEVADA, }
CARSON CITY }
CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE
Carson City, Nevada No. 743

I hereby Certify that on the 20th day of October
in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and sixty nine
at The Court House, Carson City Nevada in said County,
I, the undersigned, a ---Justice of the Peace---
did join in the Holy Bonds of Matrimony according to the laws of this State
Bruce M. Dern a resident of Santa Monica
in the County of Los Angeles State of California and
Andrea B. Merritt a resident of Santa Monica
in the County of Los Angeles State of California
in the presence of Norma L. Perondi a resident of Carson City
County of Nevada State of Nevada and
Mary Hull a resident of Carson City County of Nevada
State of Nevada who have subscribed their names hereto as witnesses.
(Norma L. Perondi) (Mary Hull) Witnesses (Sign this in Official capacity.)
Justice of the Peace.

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CARSON CITY RECORDS

Andrea Beckett's acting career was short lived. She had moved from North Dakota to New York City to become a model and an actress. After losing her husband and high-school sweetheart in an auto accident, Beckett, 24, relocated to Los Angeles. Dern was Beckett's teacher at the Strasberg Theatre Institute in the summer of 1969.

A photo of the buxom beauty in the April 24, 1969 edition of the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* was captioned: "Andrea Beckett, one of [the] newest of film stars, is queen of first Long Beach World Invitational marathon. . . ." However, the Internet Movie

Database (IMDb) does not have a biography or filmography for her.

Beckett has gone on to make a name for herself as an artist and painter. According to Dern, Barbra Streisand bought one of his wife's first paintings and he mentions Heather Locklear and Pierce Brosnan as purchasing her artwork. Besides her own houses, Beckett has also decorated a number of the homes of Hollywood's rich and famous.

"I respect Andrea enormously," Dern writes. "She's as close to the perfect lady as anyone I've ever known . . . Andrea and I have a magical existence."

Now that's one celebrity marriage that has withstood the test of time and it all started with a quickie wedding in Carson City.

Illustrations credit: Marriage and Elections Clerk, Carson City, Nevada.

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