



The romance of the Old West was, and still is, vividly conveyed to us in books and stories by Zane Grey (1872-1939), Bertha Muzzy (B.M.) Bower (1871-1940) and Louis L'Amour (1908-1988). These are tales of daring, handsome young cowboys who tame wild horses and drive cattle through purple sage on massive cattle spreads owned by wealthy ranchers who have innocent, beautiful daughters.

Always center stage is a young cowpuncher who works for a big cattle outfit while saving money for a start-up spread of his own. Enter a notorious outlaw gang that rustles cows and drives them into a secret box canyon before selling them off to other notorious crooks.

The leader of the outlaw gang is an evil, black-hatted character with plans to seduce and marry the rancher's daughter. She, however, is secretly in love with the handsome cowpuncher hero. A page-turning crescendo finds the cowpuncher riding his powerful horse hell-bent for leather to rescue his sweetheart and round up the outlaw gang.

Zane Grey traveled the West and often set his books in southern Oregon and the vast desert regions of Nevada and Arizona. His rambling descriptions mirror parts of that country today; however, modern irrigation systems have turned many acres of formerly

Buckaroos, Cowboys & Cowgirls

*Bronc busters were more than entertainment. By Marie Lee
All photos courtesy Marie Lee Collection.*

arid desert into lush fields of hay. That cowboy, buckaroo, vaquero heart lives on, however; and many of us still have a love affair with those stories of old.

By the end of the World War I an epidemic of Spanish influenza brought grief and hardship to America, and the West was not spared. By 1920 folks were ready for fun. Western entertainment was often a hastily put together rodeo. While those rodeos were not the traditional cattle roundups of wide-open rangeland, they were often called roundups. But the buckaroos and bronc busters were more than rodeo entertainment. Their skills were essential to the success of the ranching way of life.

While researching various written projects, it has been my privilege to visit with descendants of real old-time cowboys...cowboys who roped and branded cattle, who rode after and tamed desert horses. And yes, a few of them married their cowgirl sweethearts and lived happy lives together; but the reality of war, financial hardship, and failed marriages were also never far from their stories.

Boss Richardson

Boss Richardson grew up in Northern California and was the King of the first Lakeview (Ore.) Round-Up. He rode for Oregon's ZX Ranch and was in love with the chuckwagon boss' daughter, Thelma. As soon as Lakeview's first rodeo was over, Boss and Thelma married. Years later their descendants claimed that Boss' big grin, flashed while effortlessly sitting on top of a bucking bronc, was for Thelma, his cowgirl sweetheart.

When Boss hired on at the ZX, it was tradition to give the newest hand the rankest, orneriest horse in the string. Boss rode them all with little to no effort. His peers forever claimed that there wasn't a horse that Boss Richardson couldn't ride.

Boss was handsome and was invited to try his luck in Hollywood's motion picture industry, but he turned that chance down—Thelma was opposed. Instead, he bought a



BOSS RICHARDSON

small ranch near Bly, Ore., went broke, bought another small spread on Wagontire Mountain near Burns, and went broke again. He gave up ranching and worked in a sawmill, where an accident caused his death. Boss and Thelma are buried side by side in the Paisley, Ore., cemetery.

Dally Givan

Dally Givan spent his young buckaroo years riding for the MC Ranch in Warner Valley, Ore. During his life he cowboied for various spreads in southern Oregon and Northern California. He was known as the "greatest pick-up man of them all" and was inducted into the Winnemucca Buckaroo Hall of Fame in Nevada in 2023.



DALLY GIVAN

Dally and his brother Ern grew up riding rank horses. Ern would holler at Dally to come and get him, and Dally would swoop in with his horse to pick Ern off. At rodeos, Dally gave bronc riders a turn around the arena when their ride was especially good while the crowd whooped, hollered, and clapped.

Dally worked the rodeos until late in life. He claimed that he only missed Lakeview's Round-Up twice. Once was because of the birth of his youngest son who was born on Dally's 67th birthday. He was married and divorced several times and widowed once.

Dally wrote his life story in a spiral notebook. He traced his jobs and wanderings from one place to the next as if it was nothing more than an itchy foot or simply an inclination.

Ray Blasingame

Ray Blasingame's buckaroo story begins shortly before World War II. Born in South Dakota, Ray hired on at the ZX Ranch in Paisley. He was a small, wiry fellow adept at breaking wild horses straight from the desert. When he was drafted into the army, he volunteered to become a paratrooper. Ray parachuted into Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. He was also one of the valiant young soldiers who lasted through the Battle of the Bulge and earned a Silver Star.

When the war was over, Ray returned to his life of breaking horses for the ZX and con-



RAY BLASINGAME

tinued to rodeo. He rode in Pendleton and was top bronc rider at Lake County's Round-Up in 1947. His life was tormented, however, by alcohol, tough breaks, and bad decisions. A cowboy to the end, Ray is buried in North Lake County's Silver Lake Cemetery.

Wild Bill Brown

Wild Bill Brown took top bronc rider at the Lakeview Round-Up in 1926. At 15 he hired on as bronc buster with famed rancher Bill Brown, who ranched near Wagontire, Ore. Soon tales drifted through the Brown bunkhouse about the ZX Ranch. It was said that tough buckaroo boss "Dad" Worthington of the ZX was a master at bronc busting, so Bill hired on there.

Bill won at the Silver Lake rodeo. His given surname was Cox, but he took the name "Brown" from his former employer and soon became known as Wild Bill Brown. He moved to Bly and Beatty in Klamath County because he had heard about the tough Indian



SPIKE SPECKMAN ON 'BALLY DOWN'

broncs. But when he was told that the broncs at Lakeview's Round-Up were the toughest, he set his sights on Lakeview.

At Lakeview, Wild Bill Brown could not match the performances of such riders as Perry Ivory, Montana Red Tait, Pat McCartie, and Everett Riggs. After failures there, Bill hired on at the 7T Ranch in Warner Valley because he was told that many of the famous buckers came from that area.

Finally, at the Lakeview Round-Up of 1926, Wild Bill Brown drew the famous buck-er "Bally Down." A newspaper reported that the two main features of Lakeview's rodeo were Bill Brown and a horse named "Sam Singer." "Bill," a reporter wrote, "was fortunate to not draw Sam Singer because Sam Singer threw every man who mounted his grey back."

Everett Riggs

Everett Riggs, a Paisley cowboy, was disqualified from a magnificent ride in 1922 because he failed to spur with his left foot. The crowd took up a donation for him because they thought it was an unfair call, but Everett turned the crowd's money down. In 1924 he lost his balance on a great buck-er and sailed straight into the arms of pickup man Dally



EVERETT RIGGS ON 'NOT NOW'

Givan. Everett and Dally always claimed they planned it that way!

On his way home from riding at Madison Square Garden, Everett stopped off to break broncs at a Nevada ranch. When he got home, everyone wanted to hear about New York. Everett told how New York businessmen were thrilled with western cowboys, put them up at the grand Roosevelt Hotel, and made sure that the "boys from the West" were shown a good time. Everett claimed that those wealthy New Yorkers "seemed to get as much kick out of entertaining us as we did from being entertained."

In 1928 Everett was proclaimed Champion of the Northwest when he won at Lakeview. He took home the top money of \$400.

Cowgirls, too

Women were part of that old rodeo world; however, they were mostly exhibition trick riders or local rodeo royalty. It was assumed that ranchers' daughters could ride and so royalty



LUCY PAXTON

was not granted by a young woman's ability to handle a horse. It was a popularity contest.

Cowgirl bronc rider Lucy Paxton was a homesteader's daughter. Lucy—who was often called “Cheer”—was poor, and she was not favored to become queen of Lakeview's Round-Up. But she could hold her own with the best bronc rider, and during the cold, miserable roundup of 1927 Lucy was selected as lady-in-waiting to the roundup queen. In 1928, she was elected Lakeview's Round-Up queen. She put on a sensational exhibition saddle bronc ride that equaled the best. Lucy “Cheer” Paxton lived out her life in a buckaroo, ranching style.

Lorena Trickey

Lorena Trickey rode everywhere there was a western show or rodeo. She won trophy after trophy for performances the world over. In 1927 she was scheduled to give a trick-riding exhibition at Lakeview's Round-Up. Everything was ready and her horses were stabled

Lorena was acquitted on the grounds of self-defense.



LORENA TRICKEY

near the arena in the charge of her black groomsmen.

Lorena's cowboy husband, Slim Harris, spent Friday afternoon drinking and trading stories with fellow bronc busters. During an argument with Lorena over who was to drive their car, Slim threatened Lorena with a tire wrench, whereupon she stabbed him with a knife. She was jailed that evening for his murder. After a trial that was attended by newspaper reporters from the entire country, Lorena was acquitted on the grounds of self-defense. Her career, however, never recovered.

And...What About Romance?

A story of two young men who gathered wild horses came to me a few years ago as I visited



LUCY PAXTON & FAMILY

Buckaroos and bronc busters were more than rodeo entertainment. They were a necessary component for the ranching way of life. On small spreads they were the ranch owner, himself, who never considered rodeo competition—it was merely what he did for his ranch: riding rank horses

desert. Sometimes they sold them green broke, or halter broke, but often they were completely unbroke. Wild mustangs from the desert were tough and sturdy. They were as durable during frigid winter weather as they were on the hottest days of August. They would carry a man



SHIRK RANCH COWBOYS IN 1903

until they learned what was expected; breaking a team of runaways to pull the family buggy, buckboard, and farm machinery.

There were small-time ranchers whose primary source of income was gathering wild horses from the

mile after endless mile, uphill, downhill, through sagebrush, greasewood, and junipers as they gathered and drove cattle. Still today, a reliable well-broke cow-horse can gather and herd cattle almost without reins and rider. ■

with a friend (Teresa Foster) who had recently celebrated her 100th birthday. Teresa was the widow of James Foster, a Summer Lake, Ore., rancher who gathered and sold wild horses in his younger days. James often partnered with Reub Long, another rancher who lived a few miles farther north in Fort Rock.

According to Teresa, young James Foster took a liking to her; and Reub Long was smitten with another young woman. James and Reub invited the two girls to accompany them on a wild-horse gather. Things went well for Teresa and James. Teresa fell in love with ranch life, the desert, and James.

As for Reub Long? It was many years later when he married another woman, Eleanor. Eleanor was a neighboring widow who also loved ranch life and the desert. Reub spent his entire life with horses, and his is another story for another time. ■

Marie is Curator for Lake County and Schminck Memorial Museums in Lakeview, Ore. She has self-published nonfiction historical books, is a contributing author to Shaw Historical Library Journals, and a freelance writer for various publications.