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ROPERS AND RANGERS

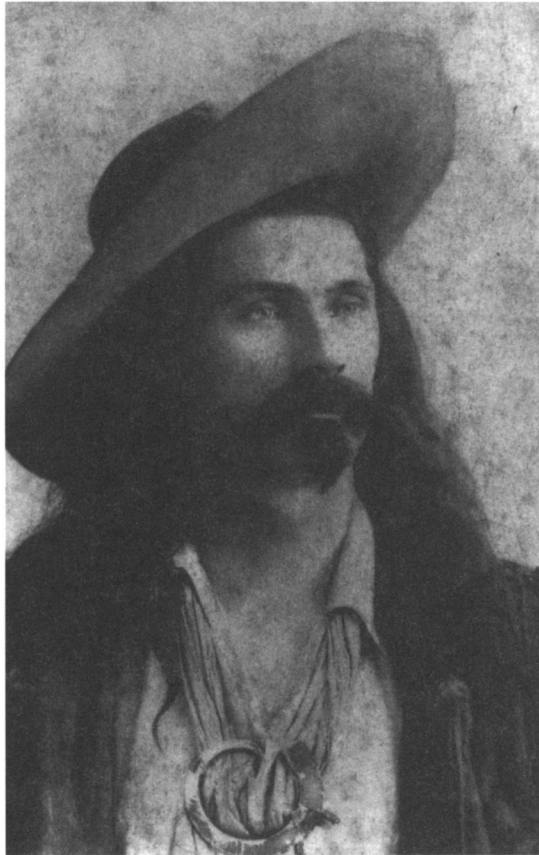
Cowboy Tournaments and Steer Roping Contests in Territorial Arizona

by
John O. Baxter

DURING THE 1880S AND 1890S, Cowboy tournaments became a popular feature of community celebrations in Arizona and throughout the Southwest. Precursors of present-day rodeos, the first tournaments involved only two events—steer roping and bronco riding, occupational skills that cowboys practiced daily on the range. In some ways, these early performances resembled charro exhibitions along the U.S.-Mexico border. But they also had strong Anglo-American roots. As their popularity increased, cowboy tournaments became tourist draws, attracting visitors and money to local communities. Eventually, they also generated criticism, leading to territorial statutes banning crueler aspects of the sport. The story of how cowboy tournaments and steer roping contests evolved in turn-of-the-century Arizona provides insight into the evolution of a peculiarly western pastime in the twilight days of the open range.

As the beef cattle industry spread north from Texas after the Civil War, drovers who followed the immense herds of longhorns amused themselves with riding and roping contests. Whenever top hands came together, talk soon turned to who could subdue the rankest bronco or tie down a spooky steer in the fastest time. To settle the question, contenders corralled some stock and improvised rules, while their friends wagered on the outcome. A classic example of this impromptu entertainment took place on July 4, 1869, at Deer Trail, Colorado. In front of a cheering crowd, a young Mill Iron outfit cowboy bested a host of competitors by topping

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"Arizona Charlie" Meadows. Cline Library Collection, NAU.

off a big bay horse named "Montana Blizzard." He was crowned "Champion Bronco Buster of the Plains" for his ride, and awarded a new set of clothes.¹

At first, these contests were organized just for fun. They soon became commercialized, however, once promoters realized that cowboy sports could draw a crowd. Civic leaders charged with planning local fairs and other entertainments began to schedule riding and roping events, along with horse races, baseball games, and other reliable standbys. These first cowboy tournaments would be regarded as amateurish affairs today, but the opportunity to watch real buckaroos perform in front of a grandstand was a solid

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box office attraction during the 1880s. Several widely scattered communities included tournaments in their civic celebrations, notably Pecos, Texas, in 1883; Dodge City, Kansas, in 1884; and Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1885. The first documented cowboy contests in Arizona took place during Independence Day festivities at Prescott in 1888. Vocal partisans from Payson, however, insist that their community instituted a similar competition in August of 1884. According to oral tradition, Tonto Basin rancher Charlie Meadows took first prize after an exciting steer roping match with John Chilson held in the middle of town.²

An expert horseman and a fierce competitor, Meadows soon dominated Arizona's earliest cowboy tournaments. A six-foot, six-inch giant, with an impressive handlebar moustache, he attributed his robust physique to a diet of mare's milk during infancy. As a sixteen-year-old, he had emigrated with his large extended family to the upper Verde Valley from Tulare County, California, in 1877. Through hard work, his father, John Meadows, established a frontier ranching operation in the Tonto Basin. Unfortunately, in 1882 the elder Meadows was killed by Apache raiders fleeing the San Carlos reservation. Despite their loss, Charlie and his brothers remained on the ranch and continued to raise cattle. The young cowboy developed an uncanny skill with his riata while checking brands or doctoring sick animals during long days on the range.

In 1888, Meadows saddled his best roping horse and rode toward Prescott to take part in a grand four-day Fourth of July celebration. For the first time, sponsors had added a cowboy tournament to the program that also included races, parades, fireworks, and speeches. To attract cowboy contestants, the managers offered a handsome saddle, bridle, and spurs valued at \$125 to the tournament champion. The lucky winner would also receive an appropriately engraved sterling silver plaque.³

Upon his arrival in Prescott, Meadows learned that the tournament was scheduled as the grand finale of the celebration. Eight vaqueros had signed up to rope steers, but only two cowboys had entered the bronc-riding contest. A large crowd, expecting a lively competition, gathered at the town racetrack during the afternoon of the last day. A few seats had been hastily erected next to the track, but most of the onlookers remained horseback or watched from wagons and buggies parked around the perimeter.

As the dust settled after the last horse race, cowboys cinched up their saddles and coiled their lariats. Steers, meanwhile, were driven onto the grounds and held at the far end of the track. According to the agreed upon rules, each roper would begin his run from a point one hundred yards behind a deadline drawn across the field. At a signal, two or three mounted men would cut out a steer from the herd and chase him at high speed toward the line. Once the steer crossed the mark, a flag would drop and the race was on. The contestant had to overtake his quarry, rope the animal around the horns, throw him to the ground, and tie three legs together with a "piggin' string"—no mean feat. The fastest time would win first prize.

Stewart Knight led off the roping competition with a performance that delighted the crowd. The well-mounted cowboy quickly overtook his steer, caught both horns with a deft throw of his riata, and tied down the animal in one minute, twenty-nine and one-half seconds. Several other contestants had tried, but failed, to make better time, when Date Creek vaquero Juan Leivas entered the enclosure and took after a high-stepping longhorn. At the end of a wild run, Leivas made a fast catch but was jerked to the ground, along with his horse and the steer, when the slack ran out of his rope. Undaunted, the roper ran to the steer and completed his tie in one minute, seventeen and one-half seconds, while the spectators cheered wildly. Charlie Meadows was the next contestant. Despite a game effort, the Tonto Basin cowboy was doomed to defeat. Although Meadows downed his steer in an amazing fifty-nine and one-half seconds, the unruly animal kicked loose before judges approved the time. Leivas was declared the winner.

Meadows and Leivas faced each other again in the bronc-riding competition. Because each cowboy had brought his own buckner, the judges instructed them to trade mounts, with each man riding the other's horse. Both broncs put on a good show, testing their rider's prowess amid thunderous applause from the spectators. The judges ruled a tie and divided the first prize. Leivas walked away as the man of the hour, carrying off the tournament champion's saddle and silver trophy, while Meadows settled for half the \$50 prize in bronc riding.⁴

As word of Prescott's success spread, other communities planned similar events to boost attendance at their own civic func-

tions. In October of 1888, Arizona Territorial Fair directors sanctioned a steer-roping contest to supplement the usual entertainment at the annual Phoenix event displaying the territory's agricultural and mineral resources. The contestants included Charlie Meadows, who despite his misfortunes in Prescott, had ridden all the way from the Tonto Basin to compete. The first round was discouraging, as cowboys missed throws, broke ropes, and fumbled ties. Performances, however, improved remarkably on the second day. This time, Charlie Meadows prevailed, defeating five other ropers and winning a trophy saddle, with a time of fifty-nine seconds. Second place went to Jim Gibson, a Globe teenager who became a fixture at Phoenix roping contests over the next thirty years.⁵

Meadows scored a greater triumph at a tournament and race meet at Payson a few weeks later. There he captured first place by tying his steer in one minute, twenty-four seconds. Runner-up was the controversial scout Tom Horn, who at the time was chasing rustlers in nearby Pleasant Valley. Horn, seeking revenge, challenged Meadows to a three-steer roping contest, which Meadows handily won. The two cowboys and their friends set aside their differences momentarily to indulge in what one reporter euphemistically described as "a continual round of pleasure lasting three days." Nonetheless, the Payson contest inaugurated a heated rivalry that added spice to Meadows and Horn's later encounters.⁶

Meadows, who was never given to false modesty, possessed an unlimited capacity for promotion that served him well during his later career as a showman and entrepreneur. Following his big win at Payson, the Tonto Basin champion published an audacious challenge in the Prescott *Hoof and Horn*, wagering \$500, or even \$1,000, to compete against any man in the world for the title of all-around cowboy. Soon after the advertisement had appeared in several other newspapers, Phoenix cowhand Charles McGary put up \$500. In April of 1889, he and Meadows squared off in bronc riding, steer roping, and a flag race in which each man attempted to pick up five flags from the ground, while racing at top speed over a 250-yard course. McGary won the steer roping, in which neither man performed very well, but Meadows prevailed in the other two events to take away the prize money and the all-around cowboy title.⁷

McGary resolutely attempted to recoup some of his Phoenix wager with a barnstorming tour across Arizona and New Mexico.

The results were mixed. He lost a three-steer match against Stewart Knight at Flagstaff in June, but won a similar event at Albuquerque in July.⁸

That same summer, Prescott once again welcomed cowboys, while Globe and Willcox also sponsored steer-roping competitions in conjunction with their Independence Day observances. The Globe contestants included Tom Horn, who had pointedly ignored Charlie Meadows's challenge several months earlier. At this time, the ex-scout owned a mine in the Aravaipa country and sometimes worked on the Dunlap family's nearby ranch. Horn handily proved his ability with a rope, bringing home the bacon from Globe with a solid fifty-eight-second run.⁹

In his autobiography, Horn relates how his cowboying contributed to an Arizona tragedy. Horn, who was fluent in the Apache language, was serving as a deputy under Gila County sheriff Glenn Reynolds when he was selected to act as interpreter at the fall 1889 murder trial of the Apache Kid. According to Horn, he was unable to resist the opportunity for revenge against his arch-rival Charlie Meadows and set out instead to compete in steer roping at the Territorial Fair in mid-October. Before a large crowd on the second day, he evened the score, beating Meadows by seven seconds in a single-steer competition. But his happiness ended quickly. On November 2, the Apache Kid and other Indian prisoners enroute to the Yuma penitentiary seized weapons from their guards, killed Sheriff Reynolds, and escaped. Horn, full of remorse, later claimed that he could have prevented the tragic incident if only he had been present. He failed to mention, however, that more than two weeks had elapsed between his victory at the fair and Reynolds's death—ample time for Horn to have returned to his duties, unless he had been delayed by another "continual round of pleasure."¹⁰

Like Meadows, Tom Horn loved the spotlight. During a trip to Tucson in March of 1890, he barged into the offices of both local newspapers, bragging that he would whip any steer roper in Arizona, Texas, or New Mexico for a \$500 purse. Envious of the successful contests staged at Phoenix, the Tucson newspapers publicized Horn's boast in the hope that the proposed match would lift Tucson's moribund economy. One went so far as to predict that "A tournament would draw a bigger crowd than the circus and be worth five times as much to the town." Regrettably, no one picked

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up the gauntlet. Soon after, Horn sold his mine and abandoned a bright future in the arena as he left Arizona to work as a Pinkerton detective.¹¹

Coincidentally, Charlie Meadows also left Arizona during the summer of 1890. Discouraged by low cattle prices and overgrazed range, he accepted an offer to perform with the Australian-based Wirth Brothers Wild West Show. The Wirths were hoping to cash in on the enormous worldwide popularity of Buffalo Bill Cody's traveling extravaganza by adding some cowboy acts to their successful circus. Over the next two years, Meadows became the show's brightest star, riding salty horses and roping wild steers in front of enthusiastic crowds all over the Far East. Eventually, his reputation came to the attention of Buffalo Bill himself, who invited Meadows to join him in London, where he was beginning a several months' engagement. Cody suggested that for publicity purposes Meadows should call himself "Arizona Charlie," thus coining the famous nickname that Meadows retained for the rest of his life.¹²

Even after its two celebrities left the territory, Arizonans continued to turn out for local roping contests. In 1890, for example, Willcox included steer roping as part of its Fourth of July celebration. Following a big parade, several foot races, and a greased pig contest, the holiday crowd assembled at the Southern Pacific stockyards to watch six entries compete in a three-steer match. Fort Grant cowboy Ed Drew made the day's fastest run, in forty-three seconds, but Charlie Gardner took first place with a total time of four minutes, twenty-six seconds, on three steers.¹³

Charlie Gardner, his older brother Alex, and several relatives had arrived in southeastern Arizona several years earlier from Tom Green County, Texas. Cattle growers and race horse men, they eventually settled in the High Lonesome Valley on the west side of the Chiricahua Mountains. Years later, an ex-employee recalled that Alex sometimes resorted to chicanery in working up a match race. On one occasion, Alex and his wife, Nancy, traveled to Bisbee dressed as hayseeds and trailing a sorry-looking nag behind their wagon. Before long, Gardner had arranged a match between his horse and a local saloon owner's handsome black stallion. After collecting as many side bets as possible, Gardner mounted his plug and left the popular stallion standing in the dust. At first glance, the story seems too good to be true. Nevertheless, American Quarter Horse Association records

show that the Gardners raised some of the best of the breed, which enabled them to win their share of match races and roping contests all over the Southwest.¹⁴

Arizonans' interest in cowboy sports revived after Charlie Meadows returned home near the end of 1892. During his two years on the road with the Wirth brothers and Buffalo Bill, Meadows had learned to love show business and dreamed of establishing a wild west company of his own. From his Phoenix headquarters, he began assembling the personnel, livestock, and equipment to launch a grand tour. Meadows had little difficulty signing up ten or twelve top-notch cowboys eager for adventure. The recruits included Jim Gibson, Stewart Knight, and other old pals, along with promising newcomers Doc Goodwin of Graham County and Tucsonan Tom Wills.

When preparations were complete, in the spring of 1893 Charlie made his debut with two performances in his new hometown. The choice proved fortuitous. Since 1889, when the territorial legislature had relocated the territorial capital to Phoenix, the desert community had experienced steady population growth. It was rapidly becoming the trade and banking center of Arizona. While commercial interests grew, the local economy also benefited from a thriving livestock industry. Each year, ranchers from around the territory pastured large cattle herds on irrigated alfalfa fields in the surrounding Salt River Valley. The everyday presence of cowboys and stockmen gave Phoenix a "cow town" atmosphere. Wild west entertainment appealed to city dwellers and country folk, alike.¹⁵

Meadows opened his production on March 25 with a splendid parade that wound through throngs of curious spectators lining the downtown streets. Magnificently attired and mounted on a snow-white charger, Charlie led the way, followed by the Pioneer Brass Band, Indians painted in rainbow colors, and a motley assortment of horsemen bringing up the rear. Twenty-five thousand people crowded into the fairgrounds grandstand to see the show that began with a flag race and the usual cowboy sports.

Proving he could ride as well as rope, Jim Gibson conquered an outlaw named "Dynamite" to take first place in the bronc riding. Doc Goodwin pulled up second in bronc riding and then won the roping contest by wrapping up a runaway steer in forty-eight seconds.



Charlie Meadows and His Cowboys, 1893. (l.-r.) Third row: Buck Bow, George Sears, Charlie Meadows, Mobley Meadows, Charles Hollingshead. Second row: Perry Sears, Tom Sears, Doc Goodwin, Tom Wills. First row: Stewart Knight, H. Martin, Jim Gibson. Sharlot Hall Museum.

Meadows closed the performance, in front of an expectant crowd, with one of Buffalo Bill's classic acts—"The Attack on the Deadwood Stage." A coach that had recently seen service at Tombstone entered the arena. Drawn by a spirited four-horse team, it careened around the race track at breakneck speed until an Indian war party struck. Because no Sioux or Cheyenne were available, Meadows had persuaded some obliging Maricopas to simulate the ambush. At the end of a running gun battle, a band of courageous cowboys appeared on the scene, wiping out the Indians while the audience cheered. Unfortunately, nightfall forced postponement of the pony express race and marksmanship exhibitions until the next day's performance. Nevertheless, the local press declared the show a smashing success and a credit to the territory.¹⁶

In early May, Meadows and his crew loaded their livestock and gear on railroad cars and left Phoenix for an extended circuit of the

West Coast. For eighteen months, the company shared triumphs and disasters as they traveled from city to city in California. Finally, in October of 1894, Charlie returned to Phoenix with plans for a four-day “fiesta” more elaborate than anything he had attempted before. The program included the usual cowboy contests and wild west acts, climaxing in “A Night Attack on the Settler’s Cabin”—a fiery reenactment that, like the stagecoach chase, Meadows had poached from Buffalo Bill. Meadows also introduced some innovations starring attractive young women, notably an English-style steeplechase and a Roman chariot race. The fearless young ladies upstaged the cowboys and won audience hearts with their bravado. As a result, the riding and roping events received only brief newspaper coverage.

Although attendance dwindled after a promising start, Meadows was satisfied with the show’s receipts and soon moved on to El Paso for a stand during the Christmas holidays. Before long, he became involved in other entrepreneurial ventures from Mexico to the Klondike that weaned his attention from the wild west arena. Nevertheless, during his early days as a contestant and impresario, Charlie Meadows was the preeminent figure in cowboy sports in Arizona.¹⁷

In February of 1896, a group of Phoenix businessmen organized a production similar to the Meadows fiesta. Styled a “Mid-Winter Carnival,” the several-day event was intended to attract visitors and stimulate the retail trade before Lent began. Promoters collected cash contributions from their fellow merchants to finance the ambitious program, and the recent completion of the Santa Fe, Prescott, and Phoenix Railroad, connecting the capital city with northern Arizona communities, augured well for attendance by out-of-towners. In addition to cowboy contests, the schedule included parades, Indian dances, a Mardi Gras masked ball, and a display of marksmanship by Doc Carver, a former star with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. The greatest attraction was a boxing exhibition featuring heavyweight John L. Sullivan, who had come out of retirement to spar a few rounds with Paddy Ryan, another aging ex-champion. Thanks to generous newspaper publicity, the opening events drew large crowds of fascinated spectators.¹⁸

On the morning of the carnival’s last day, a gang of whooping cowboys stampeded through the streets of Phoenix, causing some

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apprehension among the city folk. It was all in fun, however. As an *Arizona Republican* reporter cheerily noted, "no pistol shots were fired and the incursion did not possess the element of inebriety usual to such frontier visitations." Later in the day, an unusually large number of contestants gathered at the fairgrounds for the cowboy tournament. Some of the eleven bronc riders and eighteen steer ropers had taken advantage of the recent improvements in rail connections and arrived in Phoenix by train. For the first time, steer ropers put up a five dollar entry fee. According to the *Republican*, several thousand people turned out to watch. Otherwise, the paper's coverage was disappointingly brief. Evidently, George Sears tied his steer in forty-three and three-quarters seconds, outdistancing his rivals in the roping contest by a wide margin. Unfortunately, the name of the champion bronc rider went unrecorded.¹⁹

The *Republican* pronounced the mid-winter carnival a great success, but some of the sponsors strongly disagreed. Although hotels, restaurants, and saloons had enjoyed a week of excellent business, trade had actually declined for other merchants while many of their customers were attending the show. Still, the concept continued to intrigue civic boosters. At the end of the 1890s, southern Arizona was becoming a tourist destination for northeasterners seeking a more agreeable winter climate. In October of 1899, prominent businessman Stanis P. Clark advocated to the newly formed Phoenix and Maricopa Board of Trade a pre-Christmas carnival. To the surprise of many Phoenicians, he soon persuaded members to support his ideas. With growing enthusiasm, the Board of Trade formed committees, raised funds, and began publicizing "The Phoenix Indian and Cowboy Carnival," a five-day celebration whose name incorporated the region's two best-known attributes.

Directors of the 1899 carnival resolved to present a round of spectacular events surpassing anything seen before in the Southwest. Downtown streets were decked with yards of brightly colored bunting and a reviewing stand was erected in front of City Hall in preparation for the December 4 opening-day parade. Dignitaries on hand included Arizona governor Nathan O. Murphy, Phoenix mayor Emil Ganz, and city council members. As the band struck up a patriotic air, a contingent of Rough Riders, the volunteer cavalry recruited by Theodore Roosevelt for service in Cuba during the recent Spanish-American War, rode out at the head of the parade.

Next came the carnival queen and her six maids of honor, all Arizona girls, riding in two rose-covered carriages drawn by prancing chargers. Elaborate commercial floats continued the procession, followed by groups of marchers representing the firemen, fraternal orders, and ethnic social organizations. The usual conglomeration of cowboys and Indians brought up the rear.

In the afternoon, a cheering crowd watched national guardsmen and Phoenix Indian School cadets perform close-order drill. The day ended with a band concert, fireworks, and a stirring reenactment of the "Battle of San Juan Hill" that had brought fame to Roosevelt and the Rough Riders. In succeeding days, carnival-goers chose from a dizzying array of attractions: baseball, football, a black-face minstrel show, Indian dancers, and a miners' rock-drilling contest. As usual, the cowboy tournament was saved for the final day.²⁰

Many city businesses closed on Friday afternoon, December 8, so that their proprietors and employees could attend the riding and roping contests at the racetrack. According to the *Republican*, 15,000 people—the carnival's largest crowd—packed the grandstand and spread for more than a half mile around the railing to witness the largest tournament yet held in Arizona. Bronc riding attracted only six contestants. Steer roping, however, drew thirty-four entries, indicating growing interest in the sport. In addition to Salt River Valley cowboys, large delegations of participants arrived from Yavapai County and from southeastern Arizona.

Although newspaper publicity made Doc Goodwin a heavy favorite in both of the day's events, he faced plenty of competition, particularly in steer roping. All the bronc riders delivered creditable performances. However, the judges awarded first place to Phoenix cowpuncher Joe Bassett, whose horse bucked longer, harder, and louder than any of the others. Reportedly a graduate of Lawrenceville School and Princeton University, Bassett had moved west and became a top hand who competed in Arizona rodeos for many years. Second place went to a colorful cowboy named "One Eyed" Reilly. Reilly had gained local notoriety by roping a buck deer while riding the range. Doc Goodwin bested a powerful, and previously unriden, white horse, but had to settle for third money.²¹

After the judges had awarded prizes to the bronc riders, wranglers herded a bunch of nervous longhorns onto the far end of

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the infield and ropers made their final preparations. Big, fast, and wild, the cattle took full advantage of the seventy-five-yard score line to outrun many of the cowboy competitors. Hard to catch, they were even harder to tie. Only one vaquero had signaled for time in less than one minute when young Pinto Creek cowboy Ed Horrell, mounted on a stout black gelding, rode into the arena. Horrell's well-trained horse knew how to work a rope and how to keep a steer bedded down after he had been thrown, enabling the Pinto Creek roper to wrap up his critter in a speedy thirty-six seconds. Spectators, realizing that Horrell had set a new record, threw their hats in the air and shouted themselves hoarse. No one else came close to matching Horrell's time. Walter Cline placed a distant second, and Doc Goodwin once again took third with a fifty-nine-second run. Although the steer roping had not been very competitive, the contest marked a turning point in the sport's development. The size and enthusiasm of the crowd, the large number of contestants, and exhaustive coverage by the local press all indicated that steer roping had come of age as entertainment in the Southwest.²²

Horrell's dominating Phoenix victory made him Arizona's champion steer roper by popular acclaim. Doc Goodwin, eager to regain the crown and confident he could win an extended contest, challenged Horrell to a five-steer match for a \$300 purse. Horrell agreed to meet his rival on Sunday, December 17, at the street railway park in Phoenix. An immense crowd gathered on the appointed afternoon, filling the grandstand to capacity and overflowing into the branches of trees outside the grounds.²³

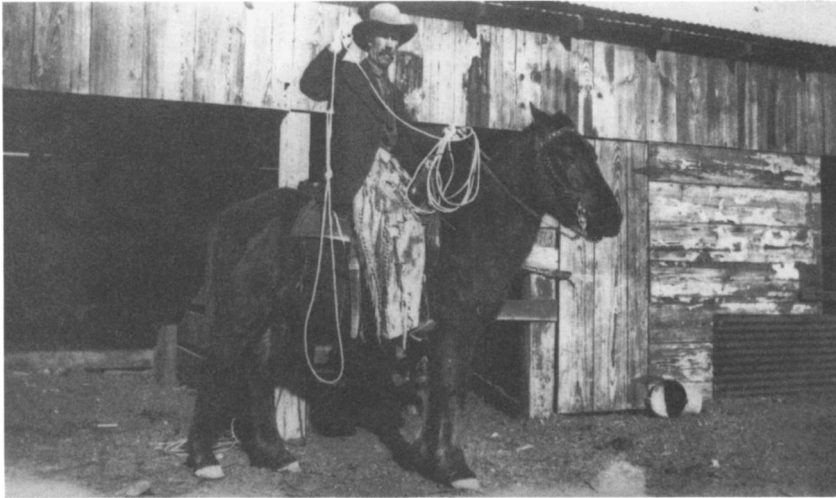
Local sports had bet heavily on Goodwin, but the Pinto Creek cowboy carried the day. Thanks to smooth work by his black horse, Horrell tied his first three steers in forty-six and one-half, forty-five and four-fifths, and fifty-four seconds, respectively. Goodwin struggled, exceeding one minute on each of his initial runs. With this comfortable cushion, Horrell eased up on his last two attempts, made no mistakes, and ended with a total time of five minutes, twenty-nine and seven-tenths seconds, on five head. Goodwin continued to have bad luck, and finished the match in eight minutes, fifteen and seven-tenths seconds. Flushed with victory, Horrell's supporters declared him world champion. In the manner of Charlie Meadows and Tom Horn, they offered to ante \$1,000 against

anyone willing to dispute their claim. A local reporter captured in verse the excitement of the moment:

My name is Horrell from Pinto Creek.
I can throw my rope and throw it quick.
I met Doc Goodin [*sic*] and downed him slick
And am ready to turn another trick.
All comers are welcome; I'll make 'em sick,
And flash a thousand to make it stick.²⁴

Phoenix business leaders, greatly encouraged by their initial success, produced a second carnival the following year. With few changes, it followed the same format as the 1899 celebration. In a triumph of Venus over Mars, the program committee replaced some of the military exhibitions with an elaborate children's parade and baby contest. Judges awarded prizes to tots in various age groups, while anxious mothers fluttered about. The 1900 carnival also included a midway, where Basco, the Australian snake man, and other exotic performers vied for attention with the notorious Little Egypt, who shocked and titillated onlookers with her seductive "Oriental dancing." The festival's directors chose Jack Gibson, proprietor of the popular Palace saloon on Washington Street, to manage the cowboy sports. A tall Texan, Gibson had won an exciting horse race during Charlie Meadows's 1894 fiesta, and later became a well-known member of the Phoenix sporting fraternity. His big gelding, Windy Jim, was hard to beat at three furlongs or a half mile.²⁵

Once again, a big crowd gathered on the last day of the carnival to watch thirty-three Arizona cowboys compete for the steer-roping championship. The cattle Gibson had rented, and pastured at Tempe, were just as fast and ornery as the ones that had bedeviled the cowboys a year earlier. Several turned the tables on their tormentors and charged furiously when roped. None of the contestants, including Horrell, Goodwin, Jim Gibson, and other past winners, performed well. In the end, Charles Davis, a hometown boy, captured first place with a time of forty-four seconds. Nevertheless, few spectators left the track disappointed. Many of them had never before seen cowboys in action. The afternoon ended with an exciting horse race in which Windy Jim came from behind to overtake Black Kid and Daisy Bell, and win "by a throatlatch."²⁶



Will Gardner. Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum.

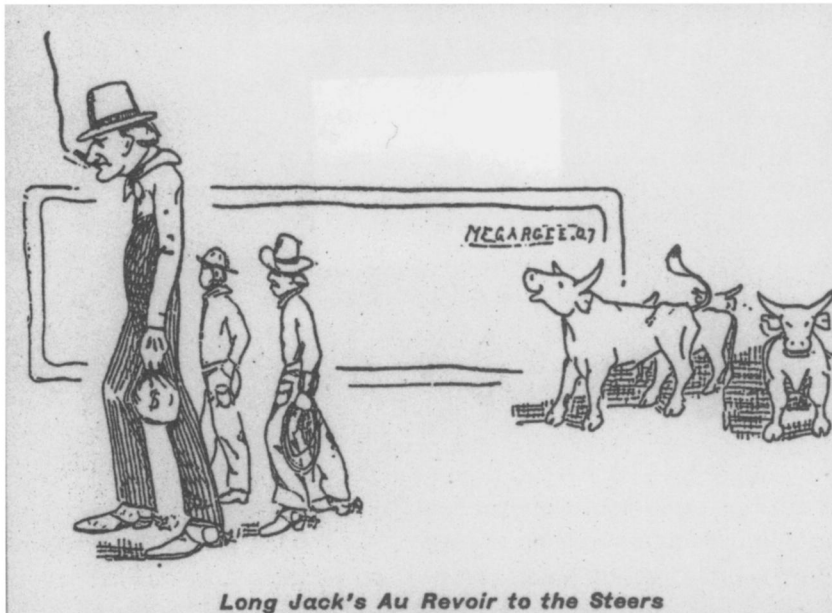
Flush with excitement, the *Republican* declared that “no civic administration was ever better managed,” and confidently predicted a return engagement the following year. A few days later, however, the finance committee’s final report revealed that the celebration had incurred a \$1,500 loss. Unpaid bills included Jack Gibson’s \$85-dollar salary and a \$300 fee for steer rentals. Several problems had converged to cause the shortage. A breakdown of the streetcar system had prevented several hundred patrons from reaching the fairgrounds for the Thursday performance. Also, city inspectors had questioned the safety of the grandstand, which curtailed ticket sales and imposed unexpected costs for repairs. Finally, and most important, the number of out-of-town visitors had declined sharply from the previous year. Board members, who were personally responsible for the carnival’s debt, quickly lost interest in backing any future ventures. Phoenix continued to stage cowboy contests during the Christmas season, but under different auspices.²⁷

The 1901 sporting calendar opened with a three-day race meet at Tucson sponsored by the Union Park Driving Club, a local horseman’s association. The program, which began on Washington’s Birthday, featured speed trials for runners and trotters, a two-mile relay race, and a steer-roping contest for \$150 in prize money. The well-publicized roping event attracted several top cowboys, includ-

ing Charlie Meadows's former protégés Doc Goodwin and Tom Wills. Some of the Gardner boys from High Lonesome Canyon also signed up. Buster and Will, sons of the wily race horse man Alex Gardner, were experienced hands who competed frequently at Fort Worth and San Angelo, Texas, and elsewhere. Buster had even won second money in a major competition at St. Louis. A Texas cousin, Joe Gardner, accompanied the brothers to the Tucson meet, along with his partner, Clay McGonagill, from Midland. No stranger to Arizona, McGonagill had punched cows for the Erie Cattle Company and other big outfits along the New Mexico border. A few weeks earlier, he had won a \$250 purse in steer roping at the El Paso mid-winter carnival. With so much talent on hand, the Tucson contest promised to be exciting.²⁸

As it turned out, on the second day of the meet the three Gardners and their Texas pal walked away with all the prize money in steer roping. Cheered on by an appreciative crowd, Buster Gardner easily took first place, completing a smooth run in thirty-seven and four-tenths seconds. Joe and Will Gardner and Clay McGonagill captured second, third, and fourth places, respectively. Not content with humiliating his opponents in the roping contest, Joe Gardner also rode his cousins' horses to victory in the relay race, where he defeated Doc Goodwin by a narrow margin. A second roping match on the final day of competition ended with similar results. McGonagill was the winner, Joe Gardner came in second, and Tom Wills managed to hang onto third place.

Although the boys had put on a good show, the best was yet to come. After the second day of steer roping, McGonagill goaded Joe Gardner into a twenty-five-dollar bet, bragging that he could beat Gardner's time on a certain black steer the day before. Gardner snapped up the wager, but soon wished he had done otherwise. In one of the great moments of rodeo history, McGonagill cast his loop around the black steer's horns and tied the animal down in an incredible twenty-three seconds. The crowd, realizing that a world record had been set, went wild. As news of his triumph spread, McGonagill became the acknowledged steer-roping champion of the world. Considered to be the sport's first superstar, he returned to Midland, but soon began competing in other roping contests throughout Texas and New Mexico. Several years later, he traveled with several associates to



Palace saloon proprietor and Phoenix cowboy sports promoter Jack Gibson. Lon Megargee drawing. Arizona Republican, February 25, 1907.

promote a series of cowboy contests in Arizona, where he created yet another sensation.²⁹

Despite his stellar performance, McGonagill was not the big money winner at Tucson. That distinction fell to Jack Gibson, the genial dispenser of strong drink who had come down from Phoenix for the race meet. Gibson, confident that a large part of the prize money was his for the taking, brought along two or three racehorses. The ever-reliable Windy Jim did his part by outrunning the local platers to win substantial purses on the first two days. On the third day, Gibson's filly, Surprise—with Gibson himself in the driver's seat—defeated a large field in the featured harness race. At the end of the meet, Gibson left for home with almost \$1,000 in prize money, in addition to the proceeds from several shrewdly placed side bets. The trip had been well worthwhile.

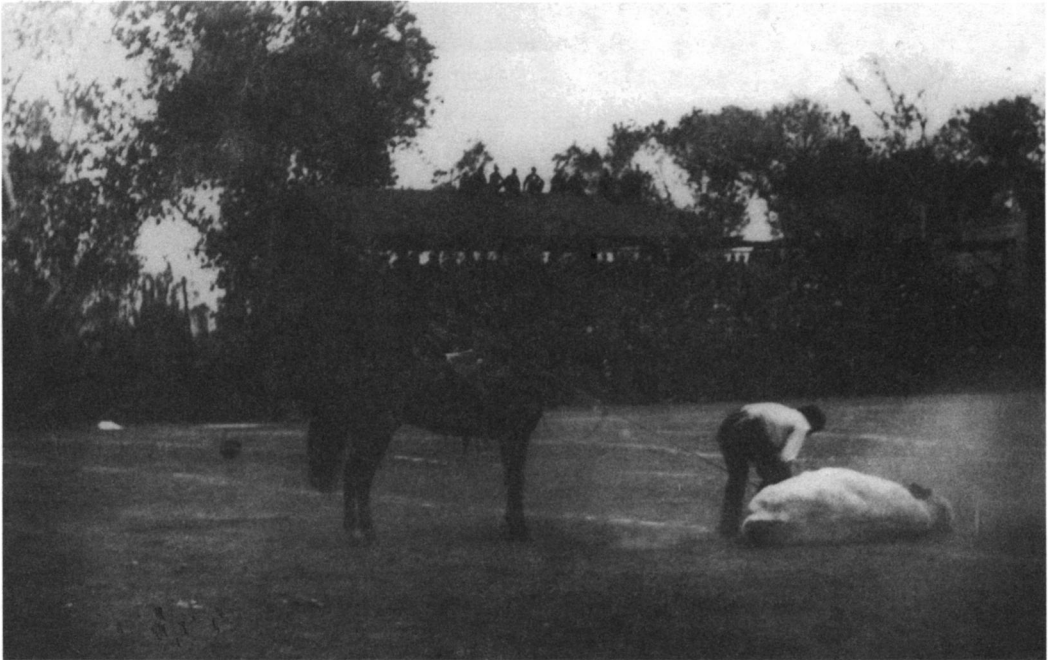
In Phoenix, Gibson's Palace saloon had become a popular hangout for cowboys, horsemen, and other sports. To show his appreciation for their patronage, Gibson began sponsoring a series of holiday riding and roping contests, taking over from the mer-

chants who had been wounded financially by the last carnival. Near the end of 1901, he organized a cowboy tournament at Phoenix Park (soon renamed Eastlake Park) on Christmas and the day after. No parades or other expensive displays were included. To ensure quality performances, and to reduce the number of cattle involved, Gibson limited the steer-roping entries to previous winners. He also required that each bronc buster bring a horse. Ropers anted a ten-dollar fee, intended to supplement the prizes Gibson provided.³⁰

When the books at the Palace closed on Christmas Eve, ten steer ropers had signed up. The list of entrants included Ed Horrell, George Sears, Charles Davis, Joe Bassett, and other past champions. Doc Goodwin and Jim Gibson were conspicuously absent. Only five bronc riders had entered the competition, possibly because bucking horses were in short supply. Townspeople, undeterred by the abbreviated program, turned out in droves for the first performance. Streetcars to the park were filled to capacity on Christmas afternoon. Carriages were tied to every available tree and post outside the grounds, and a huge pile of bicycles reclined near the main entrance. A swarm of spectators seeking a vantage point overloaded one of the outer fences, causing it to collapse. Fortunately, no one was injured. Bassett won the first round with a neat forty-three and one-half second run that bested Horrell's time by thirteen seconds.³¹

Fewer people attended the second round, which took place on a work day. Nevertheless, the ropers gave spectators their money's worth. Bassett won again in front of cheering fans, tying his steer in a rapid thirty-three seconds and walking off with \$150 in prize money. Horrell, with a time of forty-one seconds, again placed second. Joe Bassett proved his versatility by taking second place in the bronc riding, behind Joe Binkley of Prescott.

By promoting this modest celebration, Gibson gained the goodwill of the Phoenix business community and provided the public with some welcome holiday excitement. Noting that attendance and gate receipts had exceeded his expectations, the lanky Texan felt safe in planning a three-day event for the following year. While the general format remained the same, new rules in 1902 made the steer roping much more complicated. Instead of a test of individual skill, roping became a contest between three teams of two men each, representing different counties—Gila, Yavapai,



A steer roper completes his tie at Eastlake Park in Phoenix, ca. 1900. Sharlot Hall Museum #ROD-132PA.

and Maricopa. As usual, the cowboys roped one steer per day for the first two days, with the team making the best time on four head being declared the winner. On the third day, the three vaqueros with the fastest individual times entered the arena to pursue four steers turned loose at the same time. The man who roped two of the four became the show's grand champion. Gibson gathered up some cantankerous and fleet-of-foot West Texas cattle that would give the boys a run for their money.

The Gila County duo of Jim Gibson and Ed Horrell quickly opened a big lead over their rivals when competition began on Christmas Eve, wrapping up their steers in forty-one and two-tenths and fifty-six and eight-tenths seconds, respectively. Oscar Roberts, a Maricopa cowhand, tallied the best individual time, forty and eight-tenths seconds, but his partner, Charles Davis, was slow in tying an obstinate longhorn. The Yavapai team of Joe Rudy and Bert Jackson encountered all kinds of trouble that left them trailing far behind.

Gibson, on the other hand, continued to rope brilliantly, receiving a standing ovation for his record-breaking thirty-one and eight-tenths seconds second run on Christmas Day. Horrell's capable performance assured victory for Gila County. Horrell completed the sweep in a final-day melee in which he snared the odd steer ahead of Roberts, after a broken rope caused Gibson to withdraw from the contest.³²

After the competition, Jack Gibson invited the participants to a lavish banquet at the Hoffman saloon. An admiring reporter described the feast as "one of the swellest spreads ever laid in Phoenix." The approximately forty guests included cowboys, judges, timekeepers, and wranglers, along with several politicians. Together, they rehashed the day's events while consuming large quantities of refreshments. Still excited by Jim Gibson's performance, Ed Horrell and the Phoenix saloonkeeper decided to raise funds to enter the Gila County marvel in a major competition at El Paso in January.³³

El Paso merchants, emulating their Phoenix rivals, sponsored an annual mid-winter carnival that featured cowboy sports, along with a parade, athletic events, and a midway. Aspiring lariat artists, lusting after almost \$2,000 in prize money, came from far and wide to participate in the 1903 steer-roping competition. When Gibson arrived in the border city, he found that thirty-six contestants had already paid the thirty-dollar entry fee. The roster included some of steer-roping's brightest stars—Clay McGonagill; Joe Gardner; Fred Baker, a consistent winner from San Angelo, Texas; and J. Ellison Carroll, the pride of Oklahoma. The cowboys and their friends had established headquarters at the Coney Island saloon, where gambler Jack Ross was making book on every aspect of the coming contest. Sharpers generally backed McGonagill, Gardner, Baker, and Carroll at odds of 4 to 1 to win. Gibson's reputation earned him 6 to 1 odds.³⁴

The El Paso carnival opened on Monday, January 12, and was scheduled to run for a week, with the first half of the roping contest slated for Thursday morning. An unexpected blanket of snow on Wednesday, however, turned the grounds at Washington Park into a sea of mud, forcing officials to postpone the event. Conditions remained poor when the contest finally got underway on Friday.

Clay McGonagill, a heavy favorite with the crowd, won the lottery to determine position among the first eighteen contestants.



Champion steer roper Clay McGonagill. Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame, Hobbs, N.M.

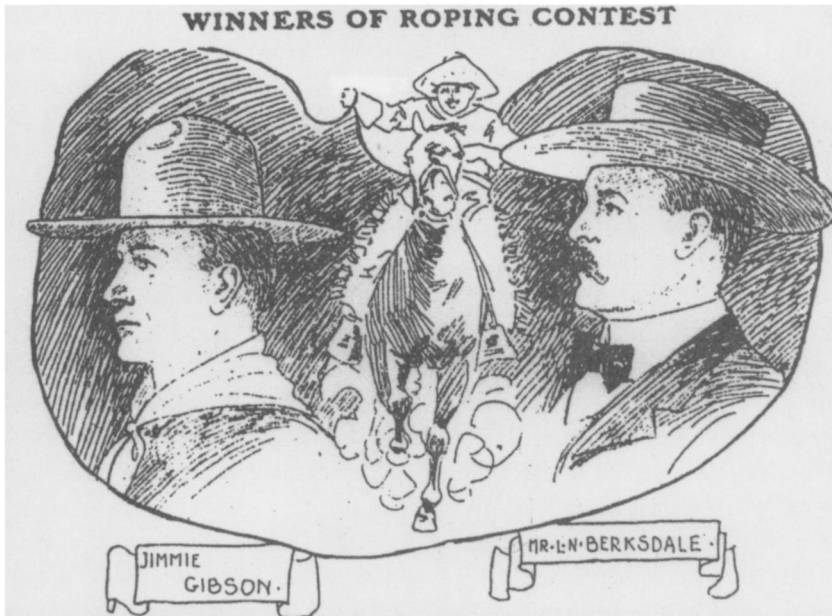
Wearing a black sombrero and his trademark red shirt, the champ entered the arena astride Joe Gardner's great steer horse, Rowdy Joe. McGonagill managed a fast catch of a rawboned yellow-and-white steer, but had to trip the feisty critter twice in the mud before dismounting to make a smooth tie. Spectators watched impatiently as an official marked the time on a big blackboard—a disappointing forty-four seconds.

Although the run was far from McGonagill's best, his competitors faced problems of their own. Some were outrun and others made bad ties. One-by-one they tried, and failed, to improve on McGonagill's time.

The ground was slowly drying out as Jim Gibson, the day's fourteenth contestant, approached the field. The Arizona cowboy surprised the Texans and thrilled his backers with an outstanding performance. Like McGonagill, Gibson had to ground his steer twice before leaving the saddle to wrap him up. But everything else worked perfectly. His signal stopped the watches at thirty-six seconds flat, and set off an extended ovation from the appreciative crowd.³⁵

Although Saturday morning's *El Paso Times* gave front-page coverage to Gibson's brilliant exhibition, the contest was far from over. By 10 A.M., more than 4,000 people had arrived at the park, under bright sunshine, to watch eighteen more ropers tangle in the second round. Jack Ross had made Ellison Carroll the early favorite among gamblers. A veteran competitor, the Oklahoman had earned stardom by winning the steer roping at the Rough Riders Reunion held at Oklahoma City in July of 1900. He had added to his laurels, just a few months prior to the El Paso carnival, by taking first prize against sixty rivals at a similar event in San Antonio. At El Paso, he rode Flaxie, a seven-year-old sorrel with an uncanny ability to hold a steer down during the tie that helped his owner immeasurably.³⁶

Drier footing greeted the second-round cowboys. Still, no one had threatened either Gibson's or McGonagill's time when Carroll rode up behind the deadline. The steer shot out of the chute at full speed, and Flaxie was on him in a flash. Carroll lassoed both horns and brought down the animal in less than twelve seconds. On the ground, however, the wiry longhorn proved to be a kicker and Carroll was unable to tie him quickly. Although many specta-



El Paso Times, *January 18, 1903.*

tors believed Carroll had taken the lead, timers clocked his run at thirty-seven seconds, a full second behind Gibson.

With Carroll eliminated, victory for the Arizona cowboy seemed assured. But, alas, it was not to be. With only three contestants remaining, Deming, New Mexico, rancher Lewis Barksdale executed a spectacular run. His turn started badly as the steer doubled back toward the pens after crossing the deadline. Nevertheless, Barksdale followed closely, threw a fast loop, and soon had his quarry sprawled on the turf. The big man drew the animal's legs together, wrapped them tightly, and threw up his hands in thirty-one and one-half seconds. Pandemonium reigned when the time was announced, as supporters spilled from the grandstands to carry Barksdale from the field. Barksdale walked off with the championship and the \$1,000 first prize, leaving Gibson to settle for the \$500 second-place purse.³⁷

Still, Arizona's top cowboy had done well in El Paso. Gibson returned home with a tidy sum and the satisfaction of defeating some of the Southwest's top ropers. In contests organized after

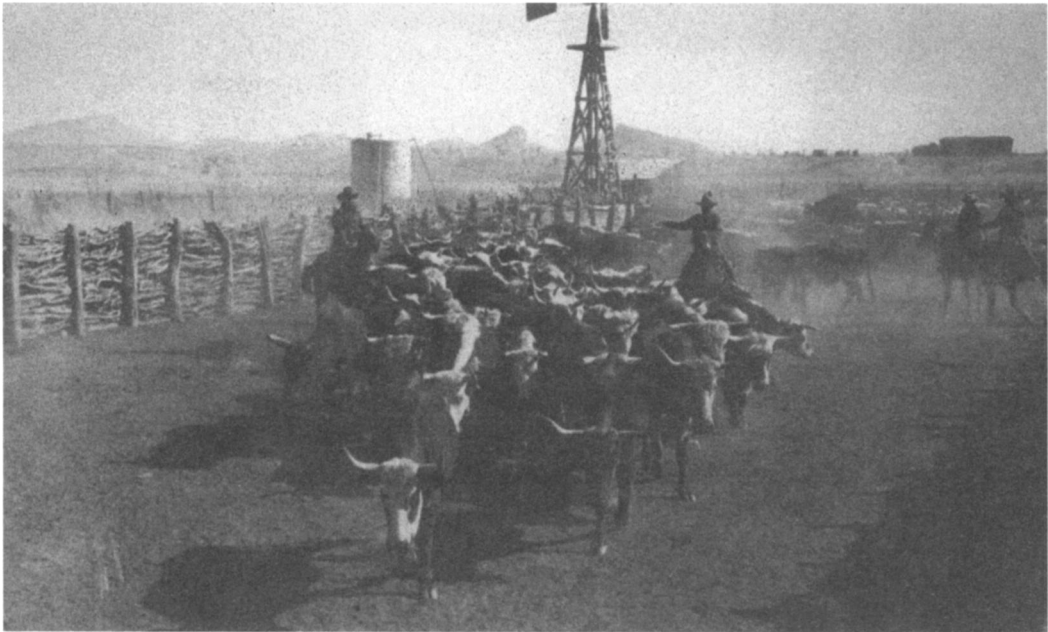
the close of the carnival, McGonagill, who had roped out of the money, made up for his disappointing showing. The former champ demonstrated remarkable consistency by winning a three-steer tilt on Sunday against nine entries at \$100 each, winner take all. The following day, he bested Ellison Carroll in a one-on-one match on five steers and pocketed \$2,000.³⁸

Nineteen-o-three proved to be an important year in the annals of cowboy sports across the Southwest. A few weeks after the big contest in El Paso, another major competition took place during the Oklahoma Cattle Growers Association annual meeting in Oklahoma City. In March, El Paso promoted a second roping event for the Lone Star State stockmen's convention. Anticipating the territorial fair at Albuquerque in October, New Mexico cowboys practiced at summer tournaments in Carlsbad, Silver City, and Roswell. Arizona highlights included Independence Day celebrations at Prescott and Bisbee, and Jack Gibson's fiesta in Phoenix. For serious competitors, the season climaxed during the International Fair at San Antonio, where more than sixty steer ropers reveled in a series of trials lasting almost two weeks.

Thanks to generous coverage in local newspapers, interest in cowboy tournaments continued to grow. Steer roping emerged as the marquee event, and its champions became stars in the eyes of admiring fans. McGonigall, Carroll, Joe Gardner, and other top hands regarded themselves as professionals and took advantage of improved rail connections to travel across the Southwest. Tournaments also became more lucrative as sponsors offered thousands of dollars in prize money to lure big-name contestants.

Meanwhile, the region's livestock industry was experiencing profound changes. Overstocking, drought, and new government land policies were eliminating open-range grazing in Arizona and elsewhere. Instead of a romantic gamble, beef production had evolved into a calculated business venture managed by cold-eyed entrepreneurs. Managers imported well-bred stock to replace the hardy, but ill-shaped, longhorns and increase the value of their herds.³⁹

Fearing that the old-time cowboy was riding into oblivion, many southwesterners looked to riding and roping contests as symbols of a heroic past and a source of regional pride. At the same time, supporters of the cowboy tradition recognized that some aspects of the tournament attracted harsh criticism. Steer



Typical southern Arizona steers used in roping contests during the early 1900s. Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum.

roping has always been a rough sport that invites serious injury as cattle are lassoed, tripped, and “busted.” As improved breeding made beef critters more valuable, owners faced substantial losses if would-be champions among their employees continued to practice their sport on the range.

After 1900, state and territorial livestock associations joined forces with humanitarians to demand legislation making steer-roping contests illegal. Ironically, agitation for a ban in Texas began during the March 1903 state cattleman’s convention in El Paso that featured a roping contest as entertainment. Two years later, Texas lawmakers outlawed steer-roping exhibitions. New Mexico enacted similar legislation that same month.⁴⁰

In Arizona, opposition to roping contests first appeared during the 1900 Phoenix carnival in which three steers suffered broken legs and had to be destroyed. A number of Eastern visitors left the grandstand in disgust. Shortly thereafter humane society members, who likened the contests to bull fights, initiated a campaign for

passage of a law prohibiting steer roping. During the debate in the local press, some commentators defended the cowboys, claiming that serious injuries to livestock were rare, while others pressed for legislative action. The *Florence Tribune* expressed the negative view, arguing that steer roping was “one of the most cruel of all gambling sports.” In the newspaper’s opinion, “to see dumb animals thrown violently down, after breaking a leg or horn, seems to savor too much of cruelty to be sport. What with branding and ear-marking and dew-lapping and dehorning, and then turned loose to starve half the year, it would seem that a range steer has a hard enough time of it without being used as a victim in such senseless ‘sport’.”⁴¹

Although many readers heartily agreed with the *Tribune*, support for a ban developed slowly in Arizona. The discussion continued as the sport grew in popularity and injuries increased. Jack Gibson’s shows at Eastlake Park were particularly rough. On Christmas afternoon in 1904, ropers crippled three of the nine steers tied down. A few months later, Wayne Davis made fast time on a steer that was surprisingly easy to tie. An examination showed that the animal had died of a broken neck caused by a hard fall.⁴²

Once Texas and New Mexico had outlawed steer-roping exhibitions, a similar embargo in Arizona seemed inevitable. The possibility for effective action improved remarkably in the reform-minded 1907 legislature. Many Arizonans believed that lax regulation of liquor and gambling made the territory appear backward and unworthy of statehood. At the recommendation of Governor Joseph H. Kibbey, lawmakers enacted bills that ended public gambling, imposed higher taxes on liquor distributors, and prohibited women from singing in saloons (the so-called “Nightingale Law”). To further improve Arizona’s image, and protect her livestock, Maricopa County council member Eugene Brady O’Neill, a leader of the reform movement, sponsored an act to make steer-tying contests unlawful. Violators would be subject to a \$200 fine and possible imprisonment for up to 180 days. Introduced near the end of the session, the bill sailed through the legislative process in record time and was signed by Governor Kibbey on March 18, 1907.⁴³

Although Kibbey’s signature seemed to ring the death knell for roping contests in Arizona, some time passed before local officials began to enforce the new law. Meanwhile, promoters orga-

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nized several tournaments in southeastern Arizona, far from the seat of government in Phoenix, that included steer tying. Even before O'Neill had introduced his bill, talent scout Lon Seeley arrived in Cochise County to sign up experienced riders and ropers for a major production. A cowboy himself, Seeley represented the 101 Ranch Wild West Show, an equestrian spectacle owned by the Miller brothers of Bliss, Oklahoma. Similar to the earlier lavish entertainments staged by Buffalo Bill Cody and Charlie Meadows, the 101 was becoming the nation's leading attraction of its kind. At the time of Seeley's visit to Arizona, the Millers were just beginning a long career in show business and needed additional personnel for an extended engagement at the Jamestown Exposition scheduled to open at Norfolk, Virginia, in May.⁴⁴

Seeley planned a three-day tournament in Douglas to give his applicants a chance to show their stuff. For added publicity, he persuaded the fearless black cowboy, Bill Pickett, to join him. A rising star in the 101 troupe, Pickett had gained national renown as the inventor of "bulldogging," a daredevil technique in which Pickett jumped from his horse onto a running steer and used his teeth to twist the animal to the ground. No stranger to the region, Pickett had been featured at one of Jack Gibson's Eastlake Park exhibitions in Phoenix.⁴⁵

An enthusiastic crowd filled the Lincoln Park grandstand for Seeley's opening performance on April 7. Gate receipts suffered, however, because railroad men had spotted a string of boxcars next to the grounds. The cars provided convenient perches for about four hundred freeloading spectators. The usual swarm of bookmakers worked the stands, taking wagers on the principal event—steer roping. Local entrants included some first-class hands: Buster Gardner; Gardner's cousins, the brothers Babe, John, and Willie Glenn; and Ed Echols, a future champion. The great Clay McGonagill, Joe Gardner, and O. C. Nations, a pal from El Paso, represented West Texas and New Mexico. Although unknown in Arizona, Lon Seeley was also a top hand, who could easily take home some of the prize money.

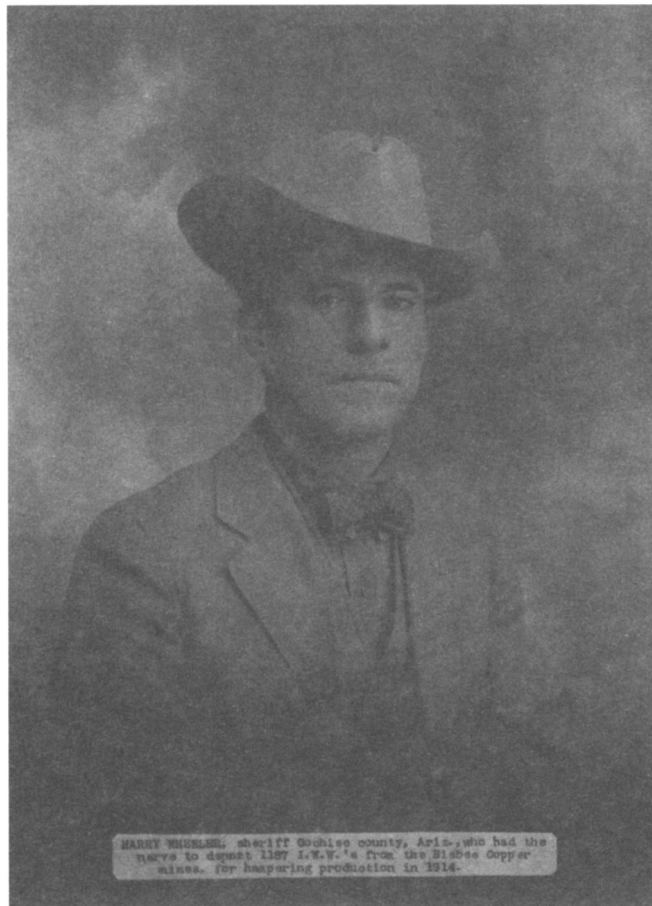
Despite the array of outside talent, the hometown boys dominated the first round. Buster Gardner won first place with a flawless twenty-nine and one-half second run, while Babe and Willie Glenn held onto second and third, respectively. McGonigall roped out

of the money on the first day, but then came roaring back. Showing championship form, he won the second round with a time of twenty-six seconds and dazzled the crowd the next day by almost equaling the record he had set six years before at Tucson—twenty-one and a half seconds. Ed Echols and John Glenn sacked up most of the remaining prizes. A game campaigner, Bill Pickett demonstrated his prowess on a couple of steers at each performance and was greeted with generous applause.⁴⁶

Ed Echols accompanied Seeley as he boarded an eastbound train after the Douglas show to meet the Miller brothers' entourage in Chicago, where the company would begin a two-week stand in the city's huge coliseum before continuing on to Norfolk. It was the beginning of Echols's lifelong association with big-time rodeo. Although Bill Pickett also had commitments to the 101, he chose to stay with his pals out west for a while longer. Encouraged by the large attendance in Douglas, some of the remaining contestants decided to stage cowboy contests in nearby towns over the next several weeks. With McGonagill and Nations in charge, they gathered together the bucking horses and roping cattle, and trailed them toward Bisbee, twenty-five miles away.

Hoping to attract another large crowd, the cowboys advertised a tournament for Sunday, April 14, at Don Luis on Bisbee's south side. About 1,500 people paid admission to see Pickett perform his amazing stunt. But, despite an abundance of talent, the event was not very successful. Pickett was injured during his first run and forced to cut short his exhibition. Then gale-force winds kicked up, frustrating the ropers and spoiling their competition. Undaunted, the novice impresarios scheduled a similar program for the following Sunday at same location. This time, their plans disintegrated in a storm of controversy.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, news of the Douglas and Bisbee contests outraged territorial officials. Council member O'Neill was personally offended by McGonagill, Nations, and Pickett's flagrant violation of the recent law that banned steer roping. Taking dead aim at Pickett, O'Neill pointed out that his bill also specifically outlawed bulldogging. Although willing to concede that local authorities were probably unaware of the law, O'Neill notified the territory's elite law enforcement organization, the Arizona Rangers, of the performance being advertised for April 21. Accordingly, on Sunday



Arizona Rangers captain Harry Wheeler. AHS #30,224.

morning Captain Harry Wheeler and a detachment of Rangers rode to Don Luis from the agency's headquarters at Naco. As spectators gathered, Wheeler warned the cowboys that he would tolerate neither steer roping nor bulldogging. As a result, McGonagill and his friends saddled a few bucking horses and rode the roping steers, which was still legal under the new statute. Described by the press as "a tame affair," the exhibition disappointed everyone involved. Wheeler's Rangers had brought a sudden end to steer-roping and bulldogging contests in Arizona.⁴⁸

As laws enacted in 1905-1907 eliminated competitions in much of the Southwest, steer ropers sought out new locations where they could practice their favorite sport. Still confident after the Bisbee fiasco, McGonagill and Pickett arranged to take their outfit across the Mexican border to Cananea, an important mining town about thirty-five miles south of Naco. There, free from irksome regulations, they planned an elaborate program for *Cinco de Mayo* (May 5), one of Mexico's most important holidays. In a novel twist, they challenged local vaqueros to a series of riding and roping contests.⁴⁹

At the same time that McGonagill and company sought refuge in Sonora, El Paso businessman Nat Greer prepared to launch a similar venture across the Rio Grande in Ciudad Juárez. With his son Tom, Greer had established a large adobe arena known as Cowboy Park, which was also scheduled to open on Cinco de Mayo in 1907. Over the next five years, the Greers produced frequent roping contests that attracted all of the reigning champions from the Southwest.⁵⁰

While lariat experts quickly found places that allowed steer roping, local sponsors of cowboy tournaments faced a different problem. Many civic groups significantly changed their programs to ensure that they conformed with the new laws. Cowboy sports remained, but with important modifications. At first, promoters simply advertised classic events like bronco busting and relay races as the leading attractions. Eventually, they introduced new contests to the venue. For example, managers of Prescott's big celebration featured bull riding in 1913, and added bareback bronc riding the following year. The 1913 program also included steer wrestling, a sanitized version of bulldogging in which the cowboy threw a steer by twisting its horns, instead of using the lip-biting technique originated by Bill Pickett. Although a great crowd pleaser, the event still violated the letter of the law, and must have had at least the tacit approval of enforcement agencies.⁵¹

By 1915, promoters had found a way to revive steer roping as a major tournament contest. As before, the eager vaquero started his run behind a deadline, galloped after the steer, and attempted to snare both horns with a fast loop. Under the new rules, however, the riata was fastened to the saddle horn with light twine that broke when the steer, still running free, tightened the slack (hence the name "breakaway"). At that moment, the timekeepers stopped their

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watches. Injuries were eliminated since no animals were tripped, busted, or tied. And times posted by the contestants were very fast—approximately nine or ten seconds. Breakaway contests at Phoenix and Prescott regularly attracted large numbers of ropers who cheerfully returned to their favorite sport.⁵²

More opportunities soon followed. Within a few years, hemp-swinging cowpokes were participating in two new events—calf roping and bull roping. After its introduction in 1917, calf roping quickly became the most widely accepted competition of its kind. Because the roper was required to dismount and throw the calf by hand to make the tie, animals were rarely hurt. An obvious attempt to circumvent O'Neill's legislation, bull roping involved a two-man team—one cowboy lassoed the animal's head or horns, while his partner rode in to trap the hind legs with a deft loop of his lariat. At first, stock contractors furnished large Hereford bulls, which they soon replaced with smaller steers.⁵³

The shakeup of cowboy sports that took place in Arizona between 1910 and 1920 ended a decade of controversy and quieted the concerns of all the complaining parties—cattlemen, humanitarians, and the general public. Although some of the regular events still skirted the law, local officials turned a blind eye and showed little interest in strict enforcement. Once accepted, the changes in format facilitated a process in which the countrified tournaments of the 1880s and 1890s were transformed into the sophisticated rodeo productions we know today. As Arizona and the Southwest grew increasingly urbanized, riding and roping contests became symbols of a golden era that had slipped away. For many southwesterners, the cowboy tournaments evoked a powerful sense of nostalgia, an emotion that modern-day promoters continue to exploit.

NOTES

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4. Freeman, *World's Oldest Rodeo*, p. 12.
5. "Fair Notes," *Phoenix Weekly Herald*, October 25, 1888.
6. "Territorial Notes," *Apache Review* (St. Johns), December 12, 1888.
7. "Steer Tying Contest," *Arizona Champion* (Flagstaff), April 27, 1889; "The Day's News in Brief," *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson), December 23, 1888. This may be the first use of the expression "all-around cowboy," which has become common in today's rodeo.
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10. Tom Horn, *Life of Tom Horn, Government Scout and Interpreter, Written by Himself* (1904; reprint, University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), pp. 213, 217-19. Horn mistakenly states that these events took place in 1888. "Latest," *Phoenix Daily Herald*, October 17, 1889.
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15. King, *Arizona Charlie*, pp. 101, 105-106; Bradford Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwestern Metropolis* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), pp. 35-38, 40. For alfalfa grazing, see Robert H. Carlock, *The Hashknife: The Early Days of the Aztec Land and Cattle Company* (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1994), pp. 221-27.
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17. "The Fiesta," *Arizona Republican*, October 23, 1894; "Fiesta," *ibid.*, October 26, 1894; "The Second Day," *ibid.*, October 28, 1894; "The Third Day," *ibid.*, October 28, 1894; "The Wild West," *El Paso Daily Times*, December 25, 1894. For the troupe's adventures in California, see King, *Arizona Charlie*, pp. 113-27.
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20. "The Big Phoenix Indian and Cowboy Carnival," *ibid.*, December 5, 1899.
21. "The End of It All," *ibid.*, December 9, 1899. For information on Bassett and Reilly, see "Movement to Suppress Steer Tying," *El Paso Times*, January 21, 1902.
22. "The End of It All," *Arizona Republican*, December 9, 1899.
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26. "The End of the Carnival," *Arizona Republican*, December 16, 1900.
27. "The Committee Reports," *ibid.*, December 25, 1900.

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28. "Champion Cowboys have arrived in Tucson," *Arizona Daily Citizen*, February 21, 1901.
29. "The Big Finale," *ibid.*, February 24, 1901; "The Last Day," *Arizona Daily Star*, February 26, 1901.
30. "Holiday Festivities," *Arizona Republican*, December 12, 1901.
31. "Cowboy Tournament," *ibid.*, December 26, 1901; "Bassett the Winner," *ibid.*, December 27, 1901.
32. "A Few Records were Smashed," *Arizona Gazette*, December 25, 1902; "A Good Exhibition," *Arizona Republican*, December 25, 1902; "Second Day's Tournament," *ibid.*, December 26, 1902.
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38. "Plains Sport Still Feature," *El Paso Times*, January 19, 1903; "Thousands See Roping Contest," *ibid.*, January 20, 1903.
39. For dissolution and reconfiguration of range cattle operations in southeastern Arizona, see Lynn R. Bailey, "We'll All Wear Silk Hats": *The Erie and Chiricahua Cattle Companies and the Rise of Corporate Ranching in the Sulphur Spring Valley of Arizona, 1883-1909* (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1994), pp. 159-67, 178-81. See also, Bert Haskett, "Early History of the Cattle Industry in Arizona," *Arizona Historical Review*, vol. 6 (October 1935), pp. 37-39, for introduction of improved breeds.
40. "Second Day of the Convention," *El Paso Times*, March 12, 1903; "Roping Contests—Prohibiting Same" (March 29, 1905), *General Laws of the State of Texas Passed at the Regular Session of the Twenty-Ninth Legislature* (Austin: State Printing Company, 1905), pp. 69-70; "An Act to Prohibit the Giving of and Participating in Cattle Roping Exhibitions" (March 3, 1905), *Acts of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico, Thirty-Sixth Session* (Santa Fe: New Mexico Printing Company, 1905), pp. 73-74.
41. "Movement to Suppress Steer Tying," *El Paso Times*, January 21, 1902. For reasons unknown, this article did not appear until a year after the events described had taken place. See also *Florence Tribune* reprinted in *Arizona Daily Star*, February 27, 1901.
42. "Second Day's Events," *Arizona Republican*, December 26, 1904; "The Steer Tying Contest," *ibid.*, March 6, 1905.
43. Jay J. Wagoner, *Arizona Territory, 1863-1912: A Political History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1970), pp. 440-42. O'Neill's proposal made it illegal "to cast, rope or throw any animal of the horse, cow or other kind." Necessary range work was exempted. "An Act to Prohibit Exhibition of Steer Tying and Steer Tying Contests Within the Territory of Arizona," *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials of the Twenty-Fourth Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Arizona* (Phoenix: H. H. McNeil Company, 1907), pp. 64-65.
44. "Arizona Cowboys to be Represented," *Bisbee Daily Review*, February 5, 1907. For a detailed study of the Miller brothers' 101 Ranch, see Michael Wallis, *The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
45. "A Hair Raising Feat," *Arizona Republican*, May 3, 1905. For Pickett's long career, see Bailey C. Hanes, *Bill Pickett, Bulldogger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977).
46. "Cowboys Give a Splendid Exhibit," *Bisbee Daily Review*, April 9, 1907; "McGonagill Equals His World's Record," *ibid.*, April 12, 1907.
47. "Draws Big Crowd Out," *ibid.*, April 15, 1907. An outstanding roper, Ed Echols reached the peak of his career in 1912 by winning the roping contest at the first Calgary Stampede.

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He subsequently served for many years as Pima County sheriff and was one of the founders of Tucson's famed "Fiesta de Los Vaqueros" rodeo.

48. "Steer Tiers in Violation of the Law," *Bisbee Daily Review*, April 17, 1907; "Law Kills Contest," *Bisbee Evening Miner*, April 22, 1907.

49. "Cowboys to Try with Vaqueros," *Bisbee Evening Miner*, May 1, 1907.

50. Baxter, "Sport on the Rio Grande," pp. 260-61.

51. Freeman, *World's Oldest Rodeo*, pp. 29, 31-34, 180.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 19; "Preliminaries in Roping Contests Started Yesterday," *Arizona Republican*, November 16, 1915.

53. Freeman, *World's Oldest Rodeo*, pp. 43-44, 46-47; "Cowboy Sports to be Staged in Better Way," *Arizona Republican*, November 2, 1919.