

EDUCATION GUIDE

THE LINGO OF CALLING OUR

The LEGACY of COWBOY POETRY



Written and curated by Laura R. Marcus,
with assistance from Meg Glaser, Steve Green,
and Christina Barr of the Western Folklife Center

Created to accompany the Nevada Touring Initiative's
Traveling Exhibition Program of the Nevada Arts Council

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INTRODUCTORY

BY BRUCE KISKADDON

*These are just a few rhymes of old friends and old times,
And I hope before I am through –
Just once in a while, they will bring a broad smile,
To the face of some old buckaroo.*

*Wherever he worked in the days that are past,
On the mountain, the plain or the valley,
What matters it now if he tied hard and fast –
Or tumbled his steer with a dally.*

*If he wrangled the bunch, if he rode gentle strings,
If he topped off the wild ones that shimmy –
If he rode with his leathers through centre fire rings,
Or sat on a double-rigged rimmy.*

*If he worked for big outfits far out on the plains,
Where they never had use for a packer,
Or back in the hills in the snow and the rains,
With the regular old greasy sacker.*

*If he worked as a drifter and trusted to luck,
If he managed a bunch of his own;
If he cooked at the wagon and put up the chuck,
Or held down a line camp alone.*

*They are plain simple tales, of the round-ups and trails,
When he worked on the range with the cattle;
Not of wild woolly nights, nor of gambling hall fights,
But the days and the nights in the saddle.*

—from *Rhymes of the Ranges*, 1924

WELCOME



The West is Dead, My Friend, 1917
Charles M. Russell, 1864-1926
Watercolor and ink drawing
Courtesy of C. M. Russell Museum



“The Lingo of Our Calling,” the title of a poem by Montana writer Wallace McRae, speaks to the specialized knowledge of cowboys and their vivid working vocabulary. Like other cultural and occupational groups, the community of people a-horseback have developed their own distinct use of words. During the late 19th century, storytelling, versifying, and singing were popular forms of entertainment and communication. Drawing from diverse cultural roots, these oral traditions became unique art forms in their own right.



Cowboy poetry and related traditions invite understanding of a dynamic occupational community whose numbers today may be small but whose stature in the Western landscape looms proportionately large, like Pecos Bill and his fellow giants of cowboy lore and literature. *The Lingo of Our Calling* exhibit offers a glimpse into the ranching world through its artistry. Selected texts, books, and sound recordings bring cowboy poetry and song to life. Cowboy gear, quilting, painting, and photography communicate volumes about rural life in the West. Short films featuring the art and work of contemporary ranchers provide a window onto the culture from the perspective of those working day-to-day on the land. Through these diverse art forms, *The Lingo of Our Calling* explores cowboy heritage—its cultural context, creative inspirations, and vibrant, enduring spirit.

The Lingo of Our Calling: The Legacy of Cowboy Poetry is curated by the Western Folklife Center and presented as part of the Nevada Touring Initiative, sponsored by *American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Genius*, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts. The Nevada Touring Initiative supports the work of artists and increases access to cultural events and experiences at the local level, particularly in communities that have typically been underserved. The Nevada Arts Council is a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Charles Russell lived in an era of tremendous social and technological change, but his heart was in the past. This particular poem is an inscription in a book and refers to the passing of his beloved West, a prevalent theme for Russell and others at the turn of the century. Russell once stated, “This old world has picture painters and picture writers—a good pen pusher has a brush man skinned to the dew claws.” He felt that writers were more talented than painters, and that the old West would be kept alive in the hands of writers.

COWBOY POETRY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

According to western writer Wallace Stegner, "a place is just a place until a poet's been there." The American West, with its vast and varied landscapes, has been graced with an abundance of poets, a number from its horseback culture, who have given us a lasting legacy of story, song, verse—of language.

During the latter half of the 19th century, cowboys began adapting, writing, reciting, and singing rhyming verses, both as entertainment and as a way of expressing themselves to others in their line of work. These verses were not intended for outsiders. The composition of poems and songs probably began as idle amusement during long tedious hours of driving cattle, while night herding in order to stay awake, or simply as "noise" to drown out other sounds in order to soothe and quiet spooky cattle.

The landscape and environment, both physical and cultural, shaped this poetry. Cowboy life in the late 1800s and early 1900s was characterized by loneliness, longing for home and loved ones, love, death, danger, tall tales—all subjects which made their way into poems that express this unique American adventure.

Poems were generally memorized and recited, often around trail drive and roundup campfires, as there was little access to books, newspapers, magazines, or other published literature out on the range. Some poems and songs originated from

familiar English ballads and were adapted to the work, events, landscape, and life of the cowboy. Passed on orally, these songs were altered to suit the narrator's or singer's specific situation, further developing the "lingo of their calling."

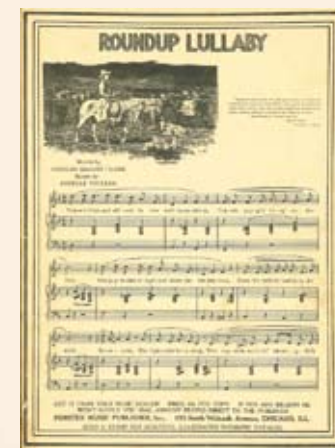
With the end of the open range days, there was more time to write and more time to read. Cowpunchers and horsemen spending long winter nights in a line camp or bunkhouse wrote by the light of an oil lamp on a fruit can label or whatever scrap of paper they could find. Rooted in the day-to-day lives of working cowboys, these poems have a ring of authenticity, providing a window onto a rugged life.

The next generation of cowboy poets added elements of the romantic and mythical West to their poems. Some classic poetry was written by acute observers who were only marginally involved in cowboy life. Yet their poems are among some of the most widely published of their time.

In the early 20th century, the cowboy poetry tradition was so strong that it seemed almost everyone involved with the cowboy way of life was writing verses and publishing books of poetry. Even the Hollywood cowboys of the time got in on the action, writing mostly for themselves and friends. In the 1920s and 1930s, some cowboy poets who had worked on the range went to Hollywood to become extras in the new medium of motion pictures. There, they continued to write poems about their cowboying days.

"Roundup Lullaby," ca 1920

Charles Badger Clark
Music by Estelle Philleo
Sheet music, Forster Music Publisher, Inc.
Courtesy of Elizabeth Dear

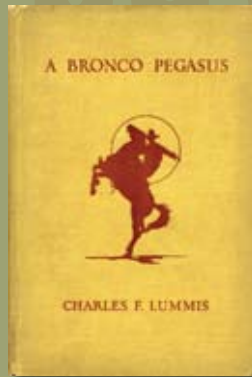


"Out Where the West Begins," ca 1940s

Arthur Chapman
Postcard
Western Folklife Center Collection

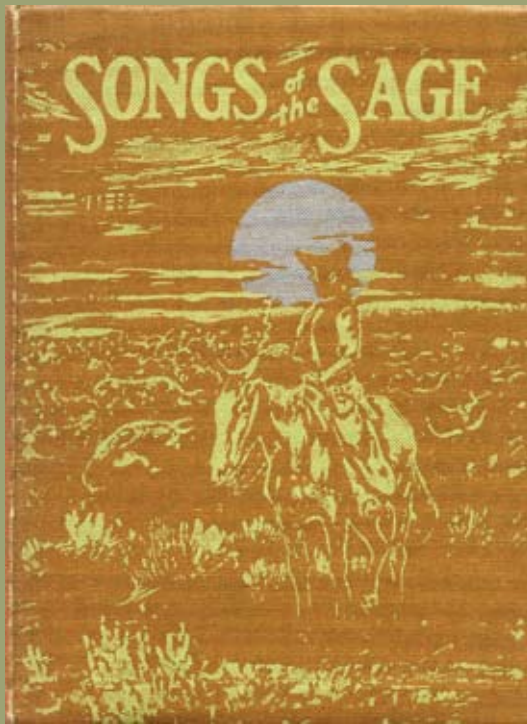
Bronco Pegasus, 1928

Charles F. Lummis
Book cover, Houghton Mifflin, publisher
Courtesy of Waddie Mitchell



Songs of the Sage, 1931

Curley Fletcher
Frontier Publishing Company
Western Folklife Center Collection



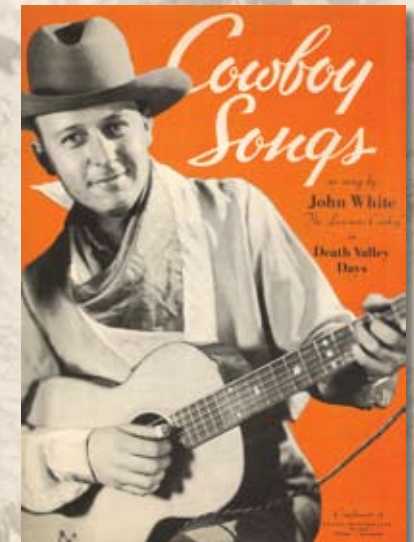
poetry

Over time, poetry grew as a source of entertainment. Through literature and movies, poetry found its way to dude ranches from the 1930s to the 1950s during the craze in "cowboy style" that included clothing, songs, poetry, and art. After World War II, Americans looking for something more wholesome and truly indigenous found that cowboy life filled the bill.

During this era, cowboy poetry circulated in various forms of popular culture, including sheet music, films drawing upon the themes of traditional poems, satin remembrance pillows, linen postcards, and other memorabilia. Perhaps due to the advent of movies and television and the popularity of the singing cowboys of the 1940s and 1950s, cowboy poets of this generation were more involved in music than their predecessors. These versifiers helped keep the tradition alive and influenced future generations of cowboy poets.

After the 1950s, cowboy culture once again moved out of the focus of the American mainstream. The rich images and sounds of that era were relegated to the memories of those who as youngsters grew up with television and radio cowboys. Some of these youngsters now make a living in cowboy and ranching communities and some now write and recite cowboy poems. Many other cowboy fans of the 1950s comprise today's appreciative audiences who love this poetry and the way of life it honors.

—excerpted from, "The Lingo of Our Calling: The Legacy of Cowboy Poetry," by Elizabeth Dear. Published in the 20th Anniversary *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* program book. Western Folklife Center, Elko, Nevada, 2004.



Cowboy Songs as Sung by John White in Death Valley Days, 1934

John I. White
Sheet music advertising book, Compliments of Pacific Coast Borax Co.
Western Folklife Center Collection

POETRY IN MOTION:

FROM ORAL TRADITION TO PUBLISHED VERSE AND BACK AGAIN



WHEN THEY'VE FINISHED SHIPPING CATTLE IN THE FALL

BY BRUCE KISKADDON

Though you're not exactly blue,

Yet you don't feel like you do

In the winter, or the long hot summer days.

For your feelin's and the weather,

Seem to sort of go together,

And you're quiet in the dreamy autumn haze.

When the last big steer is goaded

Down the chute, and safely loaded,

And the summer crew has ceased to hit the ball;

When a feller starts a draggin'

To the home ranch with the wagon –

When they've finished shippin' cattle in the fall.

—excerpt from *Rhymes of the Ranges*, 1924

Shipping Cattle in the Fall at the Keddy Ranch, near North Fork, Nevada, 2006

Christina Barr

Photographs

Western Folklife Center Collection

Some things never change—even with the advent of new technology, shipping cattle in the fall remains part of the cowboy calendar, ensuring a lasting spot for poems like this Kiskaddon classic in modern-day cowboy poetry repertoires.

Straddling the workaday lives of cowboys and the popular imagination, cowboy poetry has circulated in a variety of formats. Originally an oral tradition, cowboy poetry was recited from memory around the campfire by working hands. In the late 19th and very early 20th century, only a handful of books were published that contained what might be termed "cowboy poetry." Many were penned by writers from the East with only a passing knowledge of life in cow camps and on cattle trails. But many cowboys had drifted west from learned backgrounds themselves and enjoyed reading as a pastime. Some books of cowboy literature were published in a smaller format, to be easily packed in saddlebags and brought out in a line camp or after a campfire supper.

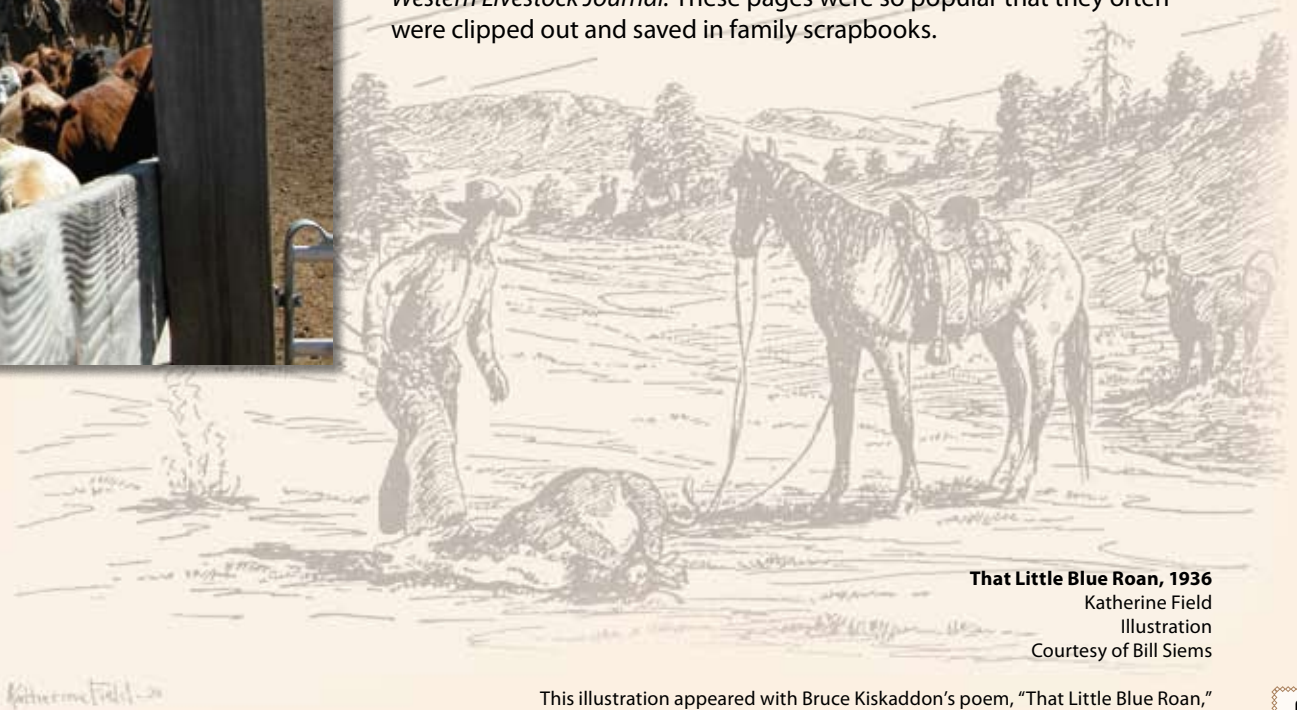
Some enthusiasts created their own poetry collections, clipping favorite verses from magazines, calendars, and other ephemera. Others wrote from memory or copied poems into homemade books, or in the pages of a published book of verse. Because of its popular appeal over the years, cowboy poetry has cycled in and out of oral tradition and published works.



A FRUITFUL COLLABORATION: KISKADDON AND FIELD

Born in Pennsylvania, **Bruce Kiskaddon** (1878-1950) ventured west to Trinidad, Colorado in the 1890s to work for cow and horse outfits. As the work took its toll on his body and it became clear that his cowboying days were coming to a close, he rekindled his talent for writing poetry. As with many retired cowhands, Kiskaddon's verse animated his memories and experiences on the range. In 1924, he published his first book, *Rhymes of the Ranges*. That same year, Kiskaddon relocated to Los Angeles, where he worked as a bellhop in a Hollywood hotel and wrote poetry between elevator rides. Kiskaddon is still revered among cowboy poets and audiences alike, and his poems are among the most oft-recited classics.

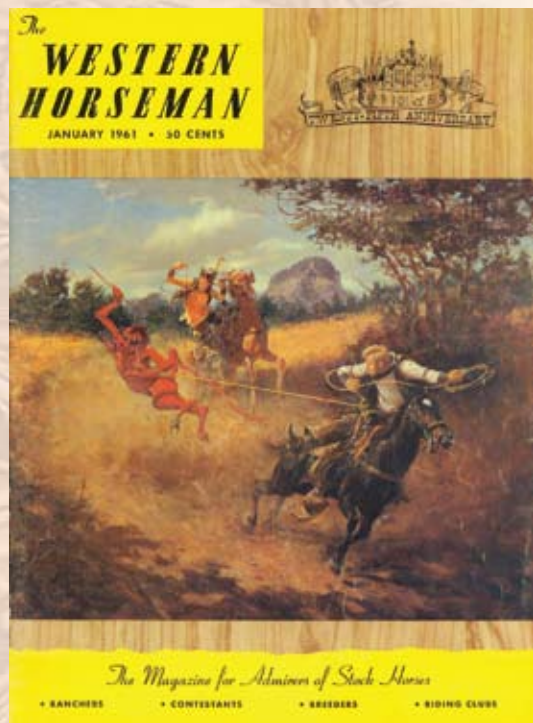
Katherine Fields (1899-c.1950), a New Mexico ranch woman, was a self-trained illustrator of ranch life. Even though they never met, she did illustrations to accompany many of the Kiskaddon poems published in *Western Livestock Journal*. These pages were so popular that they often were clipped out and saved in family scrapbooks.



That Little Blue Roan, 1936
Katherine Field
Illustration
Courtesy of Bill Siems

This illustration appeared with Bruce Kiskaddon's poem, "That Little Blue Roan," in a Holaday & Hampton advertisement in the *Western Livestock Journal*, January 1936.

ON A MUSICAL NOTE



Western Horseman magazine cover, 1961

George Phippen
Cover of Western Horseman magazine
Printed with permission of Western Horseman,
Copyright January 1961

This painting by George Phippen illustrating Gail I. Gardner's poem, "The Sierry Petes," graced the cover of Western Horseman magazine in January 1961.

Many cowboy poems were set to music and subsequently enjoyed as songs, in keeping with another favorite pastime around the campfire. Among the most favorite of these ballads are Gail Gardner's "The Sierry Petes," also known as "Tyin' Knots in the Devil's Tail," and Curley Fletcher's "Strawberry Roan." The tradition of setting poetry to music continues today, with new classics being created through collaborations between poets and musicians such as Joel Nelson and Don Edwards, and Paul Zarzyski and Wylie Gustafson.

Gail Gardner (1892-1988) grew up in Prescott, Arizona, where his father owned a mercantile, J.I. Gardner's. Gail Gardner's poem "The Sierry Petes" is somewhat autobiographical. The two characters in the poem were named after Gardner, whose nickname was Buster Jig (from his father's initials, JIG), and Bob Heckle—"Sandy Bob"—who was Gardner's real-life ranching partner. In his 1935 publication, *Orejana Bull for Cowboys Only*, Gardner explains the genesis of his famous poem.

... one time I was camped with the late Bob Heckle at the old Bill Daring Ranch in the Sierra Prieta (Sierry Petes) mountains west of Prescott. One day we came into town for a little "whizzer," and on the way back to camp, one of us remarked that the devil got cowboys for doing what we had been doing. That was the germ of an idea that came to life on a Santa Fe train in 1917 when I was headed back to Washington, D.C. to get into military service. The gentle, broad-beamed cattle in the fields of Kansas were so different from the stock Bob and I had been working that I was inspired to write some verses about some drunken cowboys handling the devil the same way they handled wild cattle.

—from *Orejana Bull for Cowboys Only*, 1935



Cattle Call, 2007

Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland

Cattle respond to the call from Jack Walther to move from one field to another. Walther, a rancher and cowboy poet, lives in Lamoille, Nevada.

on a musical note

THE SIERRY PETES OR TYING THE KNOTS IN THE DEVIL'S TAIL

BY GAIL I. GARDNER

Gardner's friend Bill Simon set "The Sierry Petes" to music, and thus the poem circulated as a song. Although Gardner retired from ranching to become Prescott's postmaster for twenty years, his heart remained in his cowboy years and he continued to write and recite his poems and stories for the remainder of his long life.

*Away up high in the Sierry Petes,
Where the yeller pines grows tall,
Ole Sandy Bob and Buster Jig,
Had a rodeer camp last fall.*

*Oh, they taken their hosses and runnin' irons
And maybe a dog or two,
And they 'lowed they'd brand all the long-yered calves,
That come within their view.*

*And any old dogie that flapped long yeres,
An' didn't bush up by day,
Got his long yeres whittled an' his old hide scortched,
In a most artistic way.*

*Now one fine day ole Sandy Bob,
He throwed his seago down,
"I'm sick of the smell of burnin' hair
And I 'lows I'm a-goin' to town."*

*So they saddles up an' hits 'em to a lope,
Fer it warn't no sight of a ride,
And them was the days when a Buckeroo
Could ile up his inside.*

*Oh, they starts her in at the Kaintucky Bar
At the head of Whiskey Row,
And they winds up down by the Depot House
Some forty drinks below.*

*Then they sets up and turns around,
And goes her the other way,
An' to tell you the Gawd-forsaken truth,
Them boys got stewed that day.*

*As they was a-ridin' back to camp,
A-packin' a pretty good load,
Who should they meet but the Devil himself,
A-prancin' down the road.*

*Sez he, "You ornery cowboy skunks,
You'd better hunt yer holes,
Fer I've come up from Hell's Rim Rock,
To gather in yer souls."*

*Sez Sandy Bob, "Old Devil be damned,
We boys is kinda tight,
But you ain't a-goin' to gather no cowboy souls,
'Thout you has some kind of a fight."*

*So Sandy Bob punched a hole in his rope,
And he swang her straight and true,
He lapped it on to the Devil's horns,
An' he taken his dallies too.*

*Now Buster Jig was a riata man,
With his gut-line coiled up neat,
So he shaken her out an' he built him a loop,
An' he lassed the Devil's hind feet.*

*Oh, they stretched him out and they tailed him down
While the irons was a-gettin' hot,
They cropped and swaller-forked his yeres,
Then they branded him up a lot.*

*They pruned him up with a de-hornin' saw,
An' they knotted his tail fer a joke,
They then rid off and left him there,
Necked to a Black-Jack oak.*

*If you're ever up high in the Sierry Petes,
And you hear one Hell of a wail,
You'll know it's that Devil a'bellerin' around,
About them knots in his tail.*

—from *Orejana Bull*, 1935



"The Strawberry Roan," ca 1930s
 John I. White, "The Lonesome Cowboy"
 78 rpm record label, American Record Corporation
 Courtesy of Steve Green



"THE STRAWBERRY ROAN" BY CURLEY FLETCHER

“The Strawberry Roan” by Curley Fletcher (1892-1954) ranks alongside Gail Gardner’s “Sierry Petes” as one of the all-time favorite cowboy songs. It started out as a poem rather than a song, first published in a 1914 California newspaper and again in the *Globe Arizona Record* in 1915 under the title, “The Outlaw Broncho.” In 1917, Fletcher published a small collection of his poems, *Rhymes of the Roundup*, which he sold on the rodeo circuit and which contained a slightly spruced-up version with the name changed to “The Strawberry Roan.” From that point on, the history of the piece dissolves into a complex but interesting maelstrom of recordings, radio broadcasts, printings, Hollywood movies, imitations, claims to authorship, legal wranglings, and oral tradition. Through it all, Curley Fletcher strove to retain credit for the poem which was rapidly becoming one of the most celebrated cowboy songs in the country.

—from “The Strange Career of ‘The Strawberry Roan,’” in John I. White’s book *Git Along Little Dogies: Songs and Songmakers in the American West*, 1975.



"The Strawberry Roan," 1931
 Sheet music, published by Vincent-Howard & Preman, LTD.
 Courtesy of Elizabeth Dear and Paul Zarzyski

That Little Blue Roan, 1936
 Katherine Field
 Illustration
 Courtesy of Bill Siems

This illustration by Katherine Field appeared with Bruce Kiskaddon’s poem “Ridin’ School” in the March 1936 edition of the *Western Livestock Journal*.



THE STRAWBERRY ROAN

BY CURLEY FLETCHER

*I'm a-layin around, just spendin' muh time,
Out of a job an' ain't holdin' a dime,
When a feller steps up, an' sez, "I suppose
That you're uh bronk fighter by the looks uh yure clothes."*

*"Yuh figures me right—I'm a good one, I claim,
Do you happen tuh have any bad uns tuh tame?"
He sez he's got one, uh bad un tuh buck,
An' fur throwin' good riders, he's had lots uh luck.*

*He sez that this pony has never been rode,
That the boys that gets on 'im is bound tuh get throwed,
Well, I gets all excited an' asks what he pays,
Tuh ride that old pony uh couple uh days.*

*He offers uh ten spot. Sez I, "I'm yure man,
Cause the bronk never lived, that I couldn't fan;
The hoss never lived, he never drew breath,
That I couldn't ride till he starved plum tuh death.*

*"I don't like tuh brag, but I got this tuh say,
That I ain't been piled fur many uh day."
Sez he, "Get yure saddle, I'll give yuh uh chance."
So I gets in his buckboard an' drifts tuh his ranch.*

*I stays until mornin', an right after chuck,
I steps out tuh see if that outlaw kin buck.
Down in the hoss corral, standin' alone,
Was this caballo, uh strawberry roan.*

*His laigs is all spavined an' he's got pigeon toes,
Little pig eyes an' uh big Roman nose,
Little pin ears that touch at the tip
An' uh double square iron stamped on his hip.*

*Yew necked an' old, with uh long lower jaw,
I kin see with one eye, he's uh reg'lar outlaw.
I puts on muh spurs—I'm sure feelin' fine—
Turns up muh hat, an' picks up muh twine.*

*I throws that loop on 'im, an' well I knows then,
That before he gets rode, I'll sure earn that ten,
I gets muh blinds on him, an' it sure was a fight,
Next comes muh saddle—I screws it down tight.*

*An' then I piles on 'im, an' raises the blind,
I'm right in his middle tuh see 'im unwind.
Well, he bows his old neck, an' I guess he unwound,
Fur he seems tuh quit livin' down on the ground.*

*He goes up t'ward the East, an' comes down t'ward the West,
Tuh stay in his middle, I'm doin' muh best,
He sure is frog walkin', he heaves uh big sigh,
He only lacks wings, fur tuh be on the fly.*

*He turns his old belly right up toward the sun,
He sure is uh sun-fishin' son-of-uh-gun,
He is the worst buckner I seen on the range,
He kin turn on uh nickel an' give yuh some change.*

*While he's uh-buckin' he squeals like uh shoat,
I tell yuh, that pony has sure got muh goat.
I claim that, no foolin', that bronk could sure step,
I'm still in muh saddle, uh-buildin' uh rep.*

*He hits on all fours, an' suns up his side,
I don't see how he keeps from sheddin' his hide.
I loses muh stirrups an' also muh hat,
I'm grabbin' the leather an' blind as uh bat.*

*With a phenomenal jump, he goes up on high,
An' I'm settin' on nothin', way up in the sky,
An' then I turns over, I comes back tuh earth
An' lights in tuh cussin' the day of his birth.*

*Then I knows that the hosses I ain't able tuh ride
Is some of them livin'—they haven't all died,
But I bets all muh money they ain't no man alive,
Kin stay with that bronk when he makes that high dive.*

—from *Songs of the Sage: The Poetry of Curley Fletcher*, 1986;
originally published as "The Strawberry Roan" in 1917.

THE COWBOY POETRY GATHERING PHENOMENON

During the mid-1980s cowboy poetry gatherings took hold, breathing new life into the art form and taking it in new directions. Today, there are over 200 gatherings throughout the West, attesting to cowboy poetry's enduring appeal among a diverse audience. Not only have these gatherings fuelled a renaissance in cowboy poetry and other art forms, but they have forged an artistic and occupational community among performers and audiences alike. Many see this community as a family.

PAUL ZARZYSKI

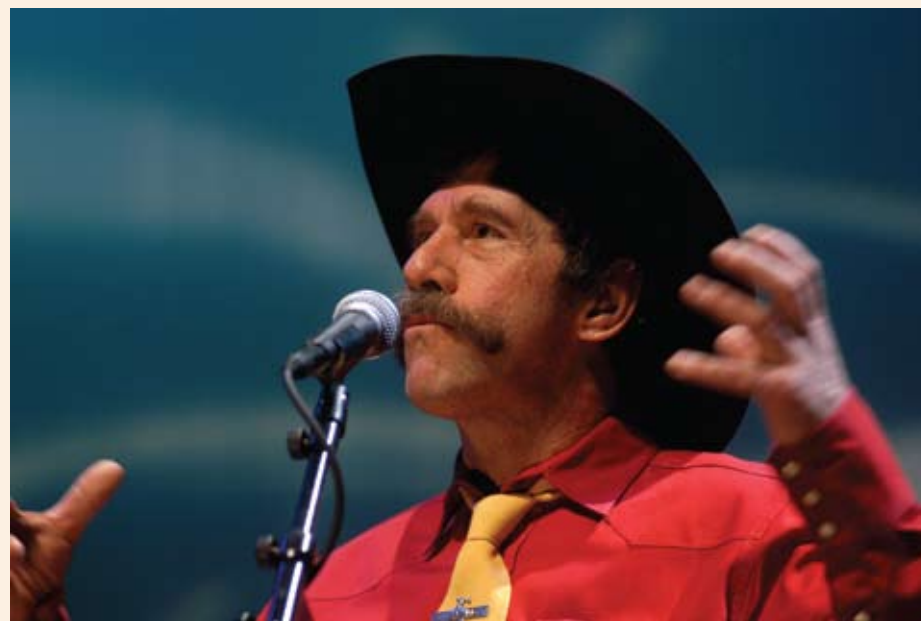
Montana-based and self-professed "Polish-Hobo-Rodeo-Poet" Paul Zarzyski learned from his mentor, Richard Hugo, that "the mission is to have fun with the sounds of words." Paul is an advocate of "Words Growing Wild" and is a fan of the Montana Wilderness Association's slogan "Keep It Wild." Working outside the metered and rhymed tradition, Paul was one of the first free-verse poets to perform for cowboy poetry gathering audiences.

Much of the rich language in his cowboy poetry comes from his years as a bareback rider in the rodeo arena. He is always on a quest for the perfect word in which to make the line or image come alive to the senses. He is a staunch disciple of one of Mark Twain's dictums: "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is like the difference between the lightning and the lightning bug." Even in his work focusing on the most serious subject matter, he holds fast to his loyalties to keep the language musical.

According to Zarzyski,

The cowboy is daily in the presence of the earth's symphonies, the four-legged and feathered maestros of the earth, and he catches himself tapping his foot to those rhythms. And before he knows it, he finds himself singing. He can't help but sing. Out in that midst of the wildest western landscape, all beings are singing. Because they feel free. And what greater virtue, what greater impetus, to bring a song out of one's heart than freedom?

—from an interview with Jack Loeffler, 2000



Paul Zarzyski, 2005

Jessica Brandi Lifland

Photograph

Western Folklife Center Collection

Paul Zarzyski performs at the 21st National Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada.

poetry gathering

WORDS GROWING WILD IN THE WOODS

BY PAUL ZARZYSKI

*A boy thrilled with his first horse,
I climbed aboard my father hunkering in hip boots
below the graveled road berm, Cominski Crick
funneling to a rusty culvert. Hooking
an arm behind one of my knees, he lifted
with a grunt and a laugh, his creel harness creaking,
splitshot clattering in our bait boxes.*

*I dreamed a Robin Hood-Paladin-Sinbad life
from those shoulders. His jugular pulse rumbled
into the rattle of my pulse, my thin wrists
against his Adam's apple—a whiskered knuckle
prickly as cucumbers in our garden
where I picked nightcrawlers, wet and moonlit,
glistening between vines across the black soil.*

*Eye-level with an array of flies, every crayon
color fastened to the silk band
of his tattered fedora, the hat my mother vowed
a thousand times to burn, I learned to love
the sound of words in the woods—Jock Scott,
Silver Doctor, Mickey Finn, Quill Gordon, Gray
Ghost booming in his voice through the spruce.*

*At five, my life rhymed with first flights
bursting into birdsong. I loved
the piquant smell of fiddleheads and trilliums,
hickory and maple leaf humus, the petite
bouquets of arbutus we picked for Mom.
I loved the power of my father's stride
thigh-deep against the surge of dark swirls.*

*Perched offshore on boulder—safe from wanderlust
but not from currents coiling below—
I prayed to the apostles for a ten-pounder
to test the steel of my telescopic pole,
while Dad, working the water upstream and down,
stayed always in earshot—alert and calling to me
after each beaver splash between us.*

*I still go home to relearn my first love for words
echoing through those woods: I caught one!
Dad! I caught one! Dad! Dad!
skipping like thin flat stones down the crick—
and him galloping through popples, splitshot ticking,
to find me leaping for a fingerling, my first
brookie twirling from a willow like a jewel.*

—from *Blue-Collar Light*, 1998; and *Wolf Tracks on the Welcome Mat*, 2003



The Legend of Pecos Bill, 1948

Harold Von Schmidt (1893-1982)

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the Museum of Texas Tech University

WALLACE McRAE



Wallace McRae, 2007
Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland

Cowboy poet Wallace McRae at work on his home ranch, the Rocker Six, in Forsyth, Montana.

Contemporary poet Montana rancher Wallace McRae has been a performer at all of the *National Cowboy Poetry Gatherings* in Elko. He has referred to that gathering as “Cowpoke Woodstock.” The author of contemporary classics like “Reincarnation,” and “Things of Intrinsic Worth,” McRae is a master of the cowboy lingo that he uses so compellingly in his well-crafted, powerful, and passionate poems.

As a contemporary cowboy poet, Wallace McRae sees in his craft “an opportunity to explain to non-ranch people some of the very things that drive us.” About the poet’s responsibilities on stage, he muses, “You know, I have a theory that if you’ve got a microphone and a podium in front of you, you have an opportunity to do at least two things. One is to entertain. And the other is to inform. And if you can do *both* of those things at the same time, you’ve accomplished your objective.”

—from an interview with Jack Loeffler, 2000

BROADSIDES

Broadsides originated in Europe during the early days of moveable type as a means of publicizing information. They began appearing in the United States during the mid-17th century, as printing became established in the colonies. At this time, broadsides were single-sided, individual documents that were printed and posted in visually prominent sites for a broad range of purposes. Before newspapers and other media were widely accessible, broadsides delivered government, political and military proclamations, tax bills, firsthand accounts of newsworthy events, social announcements, poetry, ballads, songs, and later, advertisements. As the printing industry has evolved, broadsides have ranged from relatively simple statements made in black ink to artful pages embellished with colorful type and illustrations.

Today, limited edition printings of broadsides are a popular way to give a visual, artistic representation of poems, and to bring poetry to a wider audience, including collectors and arts organizations. They also show the close collaboration and relationships developed between poet, artist, and printer. A number of cowboy poets have begun to have their poems made into beautifully illustrated works.



“Things of Intrinsic Worth,” 2004

Wallace McRae
Artwork by Clint McRae
Broadside, printed by The Black Rock Press
University of Nevada, Reno
Western Folklife Center Collection

CHARTING NEW TERRAIN:

A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW



Virginia Bennett, 2003

Charlie Eckburg
Photograph
Courtesy of Charlie Eckburg/Sweet
Light Photography

Virginia Bennett reads from
the anthology she edited,
Cowgirl Poetry, at the
19th National Cowboy Poetry
Gathering in Elko, Nevada.

With the renaissance of cowboy poetry in the mid-1980s, a new strand has emerged—one that has always been there, if more faintly heard in earlier times. In her edited volume, *Graining the Mare: The Poetry of Ranch Women* (1994), Teresa Jordan refers to a "... secret territory, the interior landscape of family, community and self." Of the growing momentum in western women's writing, she continues,

Although the work is still evolving, much of it clusters around three topics, none of which were considered the stuff of literature only a decade ago: women's particular and sometimes transcendent identification with nature; their relationships with family and community; and women's roles, both contemporary and historical, in ranch culture.

When editing *Cowgirl Poetry: One Hundred Years of Ridin' and Rhymin'* (2001), ranchwoman and poet Virginia Bennett added to the canon, hoping to encourage future generations of women poets. Acknowledging the romance of such figures as Calamity Jane or Dale Evans, Bennett introduces a different figure in her anthology:

The poet of which I speak has lived with nature and hard work. She has dirt under her fingernails more often than not, and is not averse to doing any chore on the ranch that needs doing, whether it's feeding the crew, cleaning out the hired man's house that has been left trashed by disgruntled employees, or pulling with all of her strength on a pair of OB chains, icy cold and slippery from blood and amniotic fluid, in a desperate attempt to deliver a calf born too big. She takes her kids to school, or home-schools them. She rides the horses available, sometimes even the "broncy" one disdained by the ranch hands. She's moved cows with a child perched on a pillow in the saddle in front of her. She does what must be done.

Bennett remembers the moment that inspired her poem, "That Ole Cow:" *I wrote this after taking our son, Jesse, in to the school in Kersey, Colorado for the first time. I sat in the truck across the street and watched all the children stream out at recess. Out of 200 bobbing heads, I could pick out MY 6 year old! I thought, "I'm just like an old, mother cow!" and went home and penned my first cowboy poem.*

THAT OLE COW

BY VIRGINIA BENNETT

*She stands on the ridge in the cold light of dawn
She's hidden her calf in the sage.
Her ears are alert for the sound of alarm
Her eyes full of wisdom that comes only with age.*

*She's a wiley, old Brangus, and you know what that means,
There ain't been a wilder cow yet.
But she calves out easy, ev'ry year in the spring,
And she doesn't know the sight or the sound of a vet.*

*We can count on seein' her calf every fall.
And he's just as crazy as she.
When he stands beside her, he stands just as tall.
He's sure stout...and pampered as can be.*

*Since the day he was born, she's been on the job,
And she's never let her guard down.
She'll take on all comers who get near that knob
And God help the coyote that should venture around.*

*She leads her young son to the best of the feed,
The tenderest, greenest of blade.
But when he gets full, and after she drinks,
She's off at a trot towards the home that she's made.*

*Sometimes, when I get to weighin' the facts,
She really ought to go to the sale.
'Cause she's broke every board in the pen out back,
And she's darn near impossible to get down a trail.*

*When we want to tag her calf, she can really be a pain!
Why, she's busted the hired man's knee.
But when I consider that calf's rate of gain,
I know next year's calf I'll be wantin' to see.*

*I never could savvy the way that she acts,
But I can relate to her now.
She's only protectin' the flesh of her flesh.
Now I've got a son, and I can't blame that old cow.*

—from *In the Company of Horses*, 2004

PIECING A LIFE FROM COLORS AND WORDS



Western Folklife Center Friendship Quilt center, sample, 2008

Yvonne Hollenbeck
 Hand-pieced, appliquéd, and quilted
 Cotton
 Western Folklife Collection

South Dakota poet, quilter, and rancher Yvonne Hollenbeck traces her talents to the pioneer women from whom she is descended. Through family stories and her own research, she has absorbed an understanding of the importance of poetry and quilting—art forms she believes are intertwined. She observes,

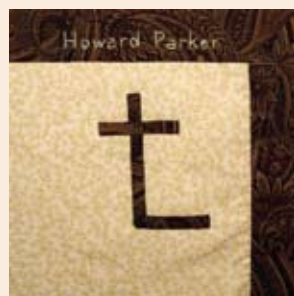
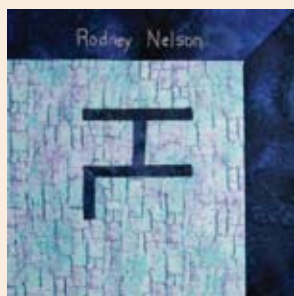
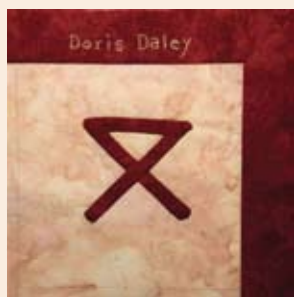
I think the two really go hand in hand. Coordinating your fabrics is like coordinating your words. Some colors and some designs go well, while others don't.

I write a lot of poetry when I'm quilting. To me, the greatest thing in my life is when I'm home alone, the men are out, I'm through cooking for the day, and it's spring. I've got my windows open and the birds are just singing away, and I'm quilting. I can really write poetry then. My mind is wandering and I'm relaxed.

—from an interview with Laura R. Marcus, 2008

A beloved traditional art form throughout the United States, quilts are emblematic of the resourceful and cooperative spirit that characterize ranching culture in the West. To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* in 2009, Yvonne Hollenbeck has designed a quilt based on the Trip Around the World pattern, with Shadow Box blocks containing the signatures and brands of many cowboy entertainers who have performed at the Elko gathering over the years. These blocks radiate outward from a central block containing the Western Folklife Center's own brand. The innermost ring is dedicated to deceased performers, whose family and friends have made their blocks. With blocks contributed by 160 poets and musicians, the Western Folklife Center friendship quilt encompasses both the history of the *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* and the camaraderie that has melded participants into a family.





Western Folklife Center Friendship Quilt block samples, 2008
 Hand-pieced and appliquéd by Yvonne Hollenbeck
 Binding machine-pieced and hand quilted by Krys Munzing
 Cotton
 Western Folklife Center Collection

PRAIRIE PATCHWORK

BY YVONNE HOLLENBECK

*There's a faded, handmade quilt on the sofa in her room,
 and she always had it neatly folded there;
 and when I'd ask about it, a smile'd come on her face;
 it pleased her so to think that I would care.*

*She'd open it and tell about the making of each block,
 and each one had a story of its own.
 It was made when she was young and was living on the ranch
 in a sod house that she called her "prairie home."*

*It was made from scraps of fabric from the feedsacks she had saved,
 or from worn-out clothes her children had outgrown;
 and every single block in that pretty patchwork quilt
 just seemed to fit together like a poem.*

*The pink block was the color of the early morning dawn,
 and that crimson one like sumac in the fall;
 yellow was the color of her roses by the gate,
 and lilac was her favorite one of all.*

*The dark one made her think about those dry depression years
 when all the hills were parched and dusty brown.
 Gray was like the rain that fell the day her husband died,
 . . . it was after that she had to move to town.*

*She said that life itself is like a patchwork quilt,
 of births and deaths and all things in between;
 and just when you are thinking that everything is fine,
 along comes something new and unforeseen.*

*Just like her personal diary, as if she'd written in a book,
 with the dawning and the passing of each year;
 it seems her hopes and sorrows were recorded in each stitch
 and each time that I read it brought a tear.*

*The story of her life, she said, was stitched in that old quilt;
 on a corner on the back she signed her name;
 then called it "Prairie Patchwork" . . . she wrote that on there too,
 as a tribute to her life there on the plain.*

—from *From My Window and Other Poems*, 2005

A VOICE FROM THE LAND

Ranch woman, poet, and English professor Echo Klaproth is among the fourth generation of the Moore family to care for the land that is home to the Nine Mile Ranch near Douglas, Wyoming. In a 2004 interview with folklorist Christina Barr of the Western Folklife Center, she reflected on the place where she grew up and the experiences that formed her, as a person and as a writer.

This is home. I'm invested in this piece of ground. I'm a soul sister to every blade of grass that's out here, every sagebrush, every rock. Out here, I have my sense of balance, if you will. I know where I fit in, and I know where I don't fit in. I know what my limits are. And the land and Mother Nature test you on all of it—lot of lessons.

I think, as a result of growing up out here, my brothers and I had an abiding faith in the cycles and the seasons, and we had such a good understanding, over any town kid, about life and death. Because we experienced it every, solitary day. We watched things be born and we watched things die. And we watched it not be fair, and we saw the survival of the strongest, and we saw the weak struggle, and some of them made it and some of them didn't. We knew all about those kinds of things. We learned responsibility at a really young age, because we had chores.

When we were growing up, our work was our play. And everything we did, all of my poetry and all of my writing is a history of what we did. I've got to be true to who I am and what I know. My writing wakes me up in the middle of the night. It won't leave me alone. It's just the way it is—I can't not write.

Some family members still work the ranch, while others return to share in round-ups and brandings. Every five years, Moore family members gather for reunions—tremendous affairs that bring over 200 people together. Echo Klaproth wrote the poem “An Epic to Our Forefathers” to share with her family at the 1985 Moore family reunion.



Moore Family, 2004

Christina Barr
Photographs
Western Folklife Center Collection

Members of the Moore family gather for a round-up and branding at the Nine Mile Ranch, near Douglas, Wyoming.

voice from the land

AN EPIC TO OUR FOREFATHERS

BY ECHO KLAPROTH



Echo Klaproth, 2004

Christina Barr
Photograph

Western Folklife Center Collection

Echo Klaproth surveys the landscape from Nine Mile, her home ranch near Douglas, Wyoming.



*Our forefathers came and on land they lay claim
but it wasn't romance on their minds at the time.
T'was freedom they wanted and moving forward undaunted
they found the courage it took for the climb.*

*The horses they rode and their cattle bestowed
years of pleasure and work like they sought.
Their spurs still jingle and our worlds intermingle
'Cause they passed us their creed as they taught.*

*It's inherit we did, got first in the bid
this heritage we share and enjoy to this day.
From them we learned, history pages have turned
and we're thankful they had stamina and stay.*

*Oh, they left us the smells that only sage gives well
as we ride across pastures of green or gold,
knew we'd blend as one with the moon and the sun
and have feelings of peace that we'd hold.*

*They showed us birth, helped things grow from earth
and cry when our livestock gives up and dies.
The handshakes are firm and friend is a term
they said treasure, respect, and sanctify.*

*And our hearts still yearn as we try to discern
what lays on the other side of each rise or hill.
We sing our own songs, try to never do wrong
and we pray to our God with free will.*

*That's wealth left behind, rare and special in kind,
so we too could know the worth of Wyoming land.
I want to discuss what's been passed on to us
so our children will know where they stand.*

*Yes, times are some dif'rent, those days have been spent,
but we can't let 'em down 'cause we know what it took,
and since modern day's our lot, should we prove tough or not
will be told o'er the years in our own hist'ry books.*

*Now I must tell ya, I don't know a fella
who wouldn't swap places with those cowboys of old.
They lived a life, knew struggles and strife
that we'll never see again but uphold.*

*And for every hero we tell there were ten more that fell
'cause Mother Nature was their partner and rank.
She bent some good men, but they stood up again
then survived most her rakes to their flank.*

*Well, that's what we remember, why that glowing ember
of what they stood for as time's progressed on.
They gave it their best and now stop to rest
entrusting to our hands what will never be gone.*

*No, we can't live yesterday or change come what may,
so we do what we can and continue to strive
for on history we build and time's unfulfilled
if we don't honor and cherish and thrive.*

—from *Echoes in the Wind*, 1993

THE WEST IS ALIVE... THE NEXT GENERATION

Although enormously transformed since Charles Russell's time, the American West is still very much alive. Ranching culture has certainly changed over the years, an evolution that can be understood through cowboy poetry and related art forms. Although large, absentee-owned corporate ranches and the flagging beef economy render ranching an increasingly challenging livelihood, some continue to embrace this way of life.

Cowboy poet and sixth-generation rancher Rusty McCall has always known he would follow the family ranching tradition, in spite of the lure of high-paying construction or mining work. He reflects, "There's nothing prettier than to be riding out on a nice spring day, and have a good horse between your knees, and you're looking at baby calves out there frolicking, and the birds twittering around in the juniper trees. That's the payoff, you know?"

In the McCall family, ranching and cowboy poetry go hand in hand. Rusty grew up on a ranch in northeastern Nevada without electricity or telephones. His parents and two sisters entertained themselves and each other by reciting poetry. The entire family took part in the early *National Cowboy Poetry Gatherings* in Elko where as a four-year-old Rusty was held up to the mike by his parents in order to recite.

As a performer on the cowboy poetry gathering circuit, McCall finds value in both the classics—which he sees as the cornerstone of contemporary cowboy poetry—and more recent original work, which conveys "the modern-day plight of the cowboy—a lot has changed between 1880 and 2008." Relishing the camaraderie of the cowboy poetry family, McCall also appreciates sharing the tradition with a larger audience, as he

feels that many are unaware not only that cowboys still exist, but that the beef they buy in restaurants and supermarkets is part of a larger food chain, starting at the ranch.

Rusty McCall believes that firsthand experience in ranching is the hallmark of genuine cowboy poetry. In 2003, at the age of 17, he wrote a 'poster poem' based on an image sent out in advance by the Arizona Cowboy Poetry Gathering. That year, the poster featured "The Last Gather," a picture of a cowboy moving horses out of a corral. At the gathering, McCall and other participants performed their original poems in the poster session, revealing a surprising range of responses to the same image.

When the McCall family left Nevada the following spring during a drought, Rusty had an eerie feeling as he thought of the poem he had written. "I had a sense of déjà vu, watching us load up the horses we didn't keep, and selling off the cows." This sense of history repeating itself goes deeper, as earlier generations of McCall's family left Texas and Oklahoma for California during the Dustbowl. Today, the McCall family runs two adjacent ranches in the Sacramento Mountains of southeastern New Mexico and vacations at cowboy poetry gatherings whenever the work allows.

—from an interview with Laura R. Marcus, 2008



Roundup Near Reno, 2007
Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland



Rusty McCall, 2008
Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Western Folklife Center Collection

Rusty McCall performs at the 24th
National Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko,
Nevada.

THE LAST GATHER

BY RUSTY McCALL

*It's going to be a long, sad day
They had to sell the ranch, and we're selling the horses today.
Now, that appy over there, why he sure could buck
You'd best know how to hang on, or just be friends with Lady Luck.
That palomino over there, he was rough to ride
I didn't much care for him, he makes you hurt inside.
Now that sorrel horse, he was one of the best
I could take him anywhere, he'd pass my every test.
Now, big or little, tough or tame, short or tall
God, how I'm going to miss them all.
I reckon I'll be moving on, 'cause I loved them horses, and now they're gone.
But it's time to go anyways,
'Cause my war bag is packed and I'm leaving today.*

—from *Thanks For The Poems*
Sharlot Hall Museum, 2006

ENDNOTE

While many cowboys are tender-hearted and sentimental, it's also been my experience that most often both men and women find it difficult to share their feelings out loud. I think it's paramount—and the main reason the cowboy's poetry and music has survived over the years and has become so popular, is because it's an accepted way of sharing those feelings. It allows an avenue of expression. They can voice an opinion, laugh about a good wreck, cry over that favorite horse's death, and in general share thoughts about their unique and special way of life.

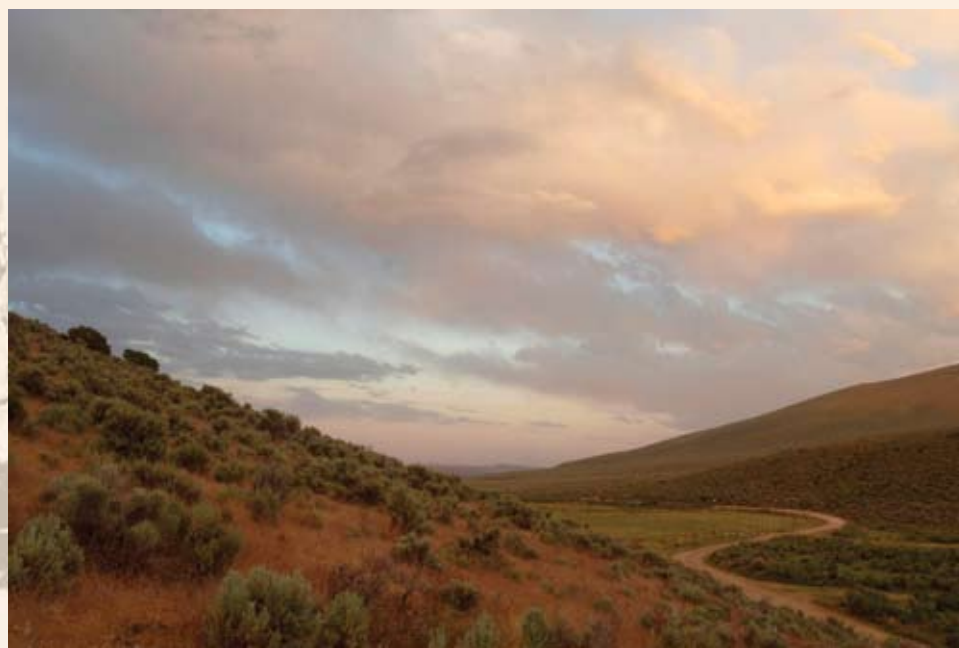
—Echo Klaproth, from *Echoes in the Wind*, 1993

Hollywood got a hold of some neat ideas and they made wonderful entertainment. But they took a sensationalized little part of it, bullet holes and tobacco juice, and we got this American icon out of it. But the truth is so much deeper than that—a cowboy does a whole lot more than wear out stirrup leathers.

When you attend a festival where you hear words woven together by men who have spent their lives on horseback with cattle, and you hear the depth of wisdom there—and the passion, the understanding, and the insight—those are the things that I want the cowboy world to be known for. Those are the things that will break down the barriers.

—Randy Rieman, Montana cowboy, rawhide braider, and reciter of cowboy poetry classics

—from an interview with Jack Loeffler, 2001



Dusk Near Reno, 2007

Jessica Brandi Lifland

Photograph

Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland

LEARN MORE ABOUT COWBOY ARTS & CULTURE



Waddie Mitchell, 2007

Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland

Cowboy poet Waddie Mitchell peruses his home library
at the Half Circle One Ranch in Jiggs, Nevada.

WEB-BASED MATERIALS

The Western Folklife Center and cowboypoetry.com websites offer a wealth of information about cowboy arts and culture, including texts, biographical information about poets, writers' blogs, audio files of poetry recitations, updated calendars of cowboy cultural events, and much more.

www.westernfolklife.org.

www.cowboypoetry.com

ANTHOLOGIES AND BOOKS ABOUT COWBOY POETRY

The renaissance in cowboy poetry has produced an abundance of publications by individual poets, past and present. The titles below are a great springboard for further reading.

Adams, Andy, 1903. *The Log of a Cowboy: A Narrative of the Old Trail Days*. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Bennett, Virginia, ed., 2001. *Cowgirl Poetry; One Hundred Years of Ridin' and Rhymin'*. Gibbs Smith, Publisher.

2004. *Cowboy Poetry; The Reunion*. Gibbs Smith, Publisher.

Cannon, Hal and Thomas West, 1993. *Buckaroo; Visions and Voices of the American Cowboy*. Callaway Simon & Schuster.

Cannon, Hal, 1990. *New Cowboy Poetry; A Contemporary Gathering*. Gibbs Smith, Publisher.

1985. *Cowboy Poetry; A Gathering*. Gibbs M. Smith, Inc.

Jordan, Teresa, ed., 1994. *Graining the Mare; The Poetry of Ranch Women*. Gibbs Smith, Publisher.

Metegrano, Margo, ed., 2002. *The Big Roundup: Classic and Contemporary Poetry from CowboyPoetry.com*. New West Library.

Miller, Warren, ed., 1994. *Cattle, Horses, Sky, and Grass; Cowboy Poetry of the Late Twentieth Century*. Northland Publishing.

Stanley, David and Elaine Thatcher, eds., 2000. *Cowboy Poets & Cowboy Poetry*. University of Illinois Press.

White, John I., 1975. *Git Along Little Dogies; Songs and Songmakers of the American West*. University of Illinois Press.

Widmark, Anne Heath, 1995. *Between Earth and Sky; Poets of the Cowboy West*. W.W. Norton & Company.

ABOUT LINGO OF OUR CALLING

The Lingo of Our Calling: The Legacy of Cowboy Poetry exhibit and education guide are based on an earlier exhibit and essay of the same name, curated and written by Liz Dear, Meg Glaser, and Steve Green at the Western Folklife Center to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* in 2004.

BIOGRAPHIES

*CHRISTINA BARR

Christina Barr has been the Program Outreach Coordinator for the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada since 2003. Previously, she worked for the Nevada Arts Council and for the Vermont Folklife Center. She has an MA in Folklore from Memorial University of Newfoundland and a BA in Slavic Cultural Studies from Hampshire College. Christina has documented traditional art forms, communities, and issues around North America and abroad, and has shared her work through presentations about folklife fieldwork, scholarship, and public sector work. In 2007 she received an Electronic Media Award for Best Documentary by Las Vegas Women in Communications for *The 24 Hour Show* radio series, which documents the lives and experiences of Las Vegas' casino and entertainment industry workers. An active participant in national and regional folklife and cultural organizations, she has served on award panels for the Idaho Commission on the Arts, the Illinois Arts Council, the Western States Arts Federation, and the American Folklore Society.

*ELIZABETH DEAR

Guest Curator Elizabeth Dear, an arts consultant specializing in folk arts, American Indian arts, western American art, and museums, began her career at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, after which she spent 20 years as Director of Programs & Education at the Museum of New Mexico. From 1990-2002 she was Senior Curator at the C.M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, Montana. In the early 1980s, she participated with the folklorists who established the *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering* in Elko, and has since continued to work with the Western Folklife Center in various capacities. She has served on the Folk and Traditional Arts panel for The National Endowment for The Arts, and was a board member of the Southwestern Association of Indian Arts, which included serving as Chairman of the Santa Fe Indian Market. Elizabeth lives west of Great Falls, Montana with Rodeo Poet, Paul Zarzyski.

*MEG GLASER

Meg Glaser is the Artistic Director for the Western Folklife Center. She has served as a director of Western Folklife Center programs since 1990, conducting and overseeing research and fieldwork, producing exhibits, performance tours, and other events of the WFC. She is one of the founders of the *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering*, assisting in the production of this event since its inception in 1985. Prior to working at the Western Folklife Center, she was Program Director at the National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) in Washington, DC, producing national performing arts tours, the National Folk Festival, and other events for the National Park Service, Library of Congress, and National Endowment for the Arts.

*LAURA R. MARCUS

Guest curator Laura R. Marcus, Ph.D. is an independent folklorist, writer, and consultant specializing in cultural arts and heritage fieldwork. Previous positions include Program Associate at the Fund for Folk Culture and founding coordinator of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization's Arts for New Immigrants Program in Portland, Oregon. She has also conducted research on Navajo trading and art; worked for state folk arts programs in Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Oregon; taught classes in folklore and ethnography-related subjects; and facilitated creative writing workshops in underserved communities. Recent publications include *The New Mexico Fiber Arts Trail Guide*, with New Mexico Arts; *The Art of Community; Creativity at the Crossroads of Immigrant Cultures and Social Services*, with the Institute for Cultural Partnerships and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees; and an entry, "Navajo Folklore," for the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore*.

RESOURCES

The **Nevada Arts Council** (NAC) is the state agency charged with supporting Nevada's arts and cultural sector and expanding access to and public participation in the arts through its grants, programs and services. NAC is a division of the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs, and receives funding from the Nevada State Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts. In partnership with schools, arts institutions and communities throughout the state, NAC actively works to bring artists, art forms and audiences together in Nevada's populous cities and remote rural towns of all sizes.

One of NAC's most visible programs, the **Nevada Touring Initiative** (NTI) is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, and through partnerships with the Western Folklife Center and other cultural institutions throughout the region. NTI features two components—the Traveling Exhibition Program and the Tumblewords Program. These programs support the work of artists and increase access to visual arts exhibitions and writers in residency at the local level.

An eligible NTI sponsor can be any non-profit Nevada organization with 501(c)3 status or a state, federal, or tribal agency, willing to undertake local responsibility for presenting a Traveling Exhibition or Tumblewords residency. Sponsors may include local arts agencies, arts organizations, community centers, museums, libraries, and colleges. We encourage interested sponsors to apply for NTI programs by visiting the NAC website at: www.nevadaculture.org.



The **Western Folklife Center** is a regional non-profit arts organization headquartered in Elko, Nevada, that works to enhance the vitality of American life through the experience, understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultural heritage of the American West. This mission is implemented through the annual *National Cowboy Poetry Gathering*, and through performances, exhibitions, educational programs, media productions (radio and television), research, documentation and preservation projects that celebrate the wisdom, artistry and ingenuity of western folkways. To learn more about current programs of the Western Folklife Center visit: www.westernfolklife.org.



Front cover photo credits:

Waddie Mitchell, 2007

Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland

Dusk Near Reno, 2007

Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland

Wallace McRae, 2007

Jessica Brandi Lifland
Photograph
Courtesy of Jessica Brandi Lifland



THE LINGO OF CALLING OUR

