



ALLYCE'S ATTIC

by MARY ALLYCE

Is it summer already? We are past Memorial Day, the unofficial start of summer. Summer means many things and in the west, summer means rodeos are gearing up.

Rodeos attract tourists to Bandera and surrounding environs from all over the world and they all want to see "real cowboys". Some years ago, American Cowboy Magazine decided there should be a specific holiday honoring cowboys and The National Day of The American Cowboy (NDoAC) was born. Celebrated in cities and towns from Texas to Arizona to California and beyond, always the fourth Saturday in July and ratified annually by the United States Congress, the NDoAC has captured the hearts of big and little kids and the spirit of the American cowboy hero. But . . .

Real cowboys. What the heck does that mean?

I wrote a very little book - a booklet really, called The Real Deal – Or Real Cowboys Write Poetry. I continue expanding it and hope someday it grows up into a "real" book. The Real Deal strives to answer the question, "What is a 'real' cowboy?" through cowboy poetry, history and even cooking – on a campfire, of course. Some of it's tongue-in-cheek, some of it's serious, but it covers what most people look for – the outfit, a horse, somebody who rides big, ornery critters coming out of a rodeo chute. In fact, for most folks it's all a matter of hats, boots and spurs. If you wear at least two of the three, you're likely to get asked,

"Are you a real cowboy?"

Better have an answer ready. Or a horse nearby.

Here in Bandera, the official Cowboy Capital (so saith the State of Texas), The Frontier Times Museum (www.frontiertimesmuseum.org) presents the NDoAC every year with activities, culminating in a Ranch Rodeo at Bandera's historic Mansfield

Park. Ranch Rodeo events show off real skills needed on ranches like herding and sorting, doctoring, bronc riding and races – competitions cowboys of old devised for fun on the ranch and range when the work day was done.

Cowboy poetry, which combined elements of Irish folk music, English madrigals, and a form of song black cowboys brought with them from the plantations after the Civil War, called "hollerin'" is real, too. Storytelling and poetry have defined cowboys from the get-go and most have at least one good story and one good poem in their hip pocket. It's somewhere near the tin of snuff.

Yes, there are real cowboys, but they don't look or sound much like Roy Rogers, John Wayne, Clint Eastwood or Robert Duvall. Texas unashamedly created a mythic American Texas cowboy hero to help lift itself out of the Great Depression. Ask Larry McMurtry why he wrote Lonesome Dove. It was to attempt to kill off the myth of the cowboy, which McMurtry sees as a downright lie.

It didn't work.

Hollywood announces the death of the western again and again.

Western films still show up like clockwork every few years.

Whether the "real cowboy" is a myth or a fact, or a combination of the two, the American cowboy hero refuses to die. Chris LeDoux sang "You Just Can't See Him From The Road" and George Strait sang "This Is Where The Cowboy Rides Away" but the truth is, the image of the American cowboy will be around as long as we need heroes. It's up to them to live up to that lofty perch and take the slings and arrows that inevitably go along with being an heroic figure.

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