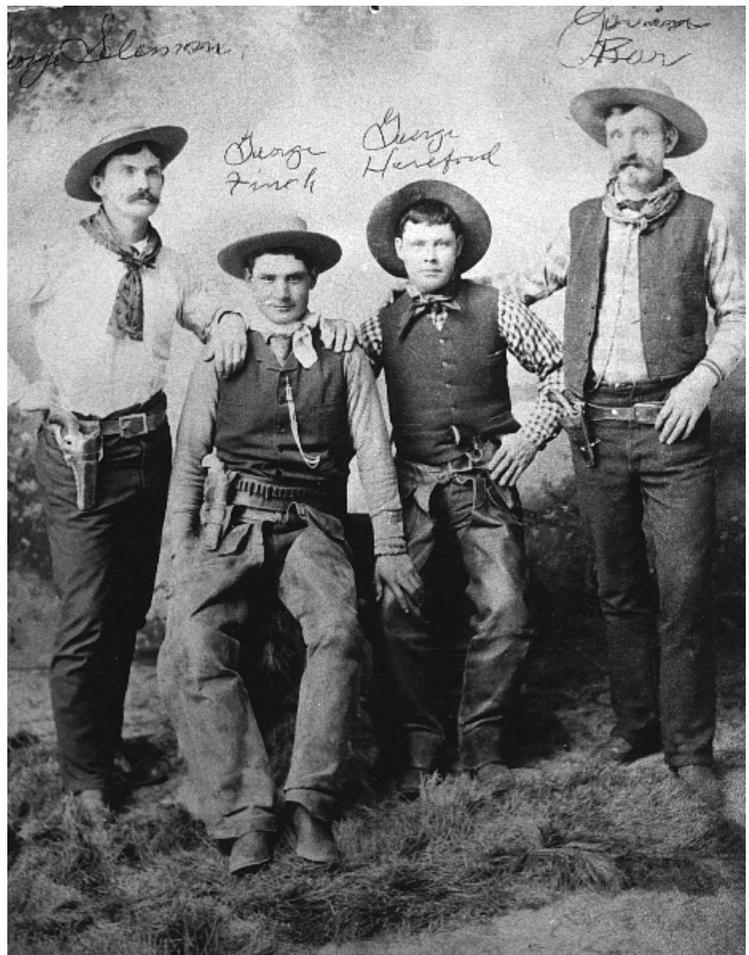


a real cowboy

George Hereford is generally conceded to have been one of the best riders the West has ever seen. “Nothing fancy,” old-timers agreed, “just damned fine riding.” “It was his legs,” one told us. “With them stout legs he couldn’t squeeze a horse in two.”

During the spring roundup in 1887, a bunch of cowboys were yarning around the campfire. One of them mentioned that he’d read in a newspaper where a famous rider had put a twenty dollar gold piece in each stirrup and in the saddle and ridden a bronc to a finish without losing a coin. They discussed it a while, and then put the idea to George. He opined as how he’d never thought of doing such a thing but he’d be willing to give it a try. The rest of the boys made bets.



Henry’s Fork cowboys. George Hereford is third from left

The next day one of them went out and roped an animal that had never been ridden. They had quite a tussle getting the saddle settled and cinched. But when they turned out their pockets looking for coins to substitute for the gold pieces, nary a one showed up. Someone got the bright idea of using the lids from small pork and bean cans that'd been thrown away from the chuck wagon.

While the others blindfolded and eared down the bronc, George got on and the lids were put in place. There followed an exciting ten minutes during which the horse tried every trick in the book, but George's legs never relaxed their grip. Finally it stood still, its head between its stiff legs, its body quivering. A bit doubtfully, George took one foot out of the stirrup. A lid fell to the ground. He cautiously withdrew the other foot and a second lid followed. Then, standing in the stirrups, he reached under and pulled out the third lid. The doubters were convinced and his backers were jubilant.

Soon after the can-lid demonstration, Colonel Buffalo Bill Cody brought his Wild West Show to Evanston and offered a prize for the best rider in the district. George competed and won hands down. His chief competitor was Oscar Quinn, the acknowledged champion of both Utah and Wyoming.

Cody offered George a chance to join the show for its upcoming tour of England and Europe. One old-timer told us—probably with tongue in cheek—that George flatly refused because of the ocean voyage involved; that the one thing in the world George was afraid of was water. Actually George was eager to make the trip. He'd reached Laramie on his way to join Cody when he got word his brother Robert had died suddenly and he responded to his father's appeal to come home.

He was an exceptional roper as well. Unlike most cowboys, he carried his rope on the left side of the saddle. In a contest at Big Piney he roped a hundred calves in a hundred straight throws. If he was set to rope a horse and it suddenly reversed its direction, it made no difference, for George could front-foot it as easily behind him as he could in front. He was no showoff, though, and didn't really care much for performing before crowds. He simply enjoyed his work and was happiest while doing it.

George Hereford stands as an example of the old-time cowboy at his best—genial, fond of a laugh, proud of his work, confident of his skill, a good comrade, a loyal friend, and a square-shooter in every way—“a good man to ride the range with ,” the cowboy's highest praise.

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