

From a Poem to a Painting

GAIL GARDNER SPEAKS: I've had a great deal of fun with it [Tying the Knots in the Devil's Tail] and of course, this painting that George Phippen has done, well, it's sort of the Mona Lisa to me. It's one of my greatest treasures.

George [said he] wanted permission to reprint the poem just to illustrate some little sketches around it for a magazine. Well, I didn't know that he'd been commissioned to do this painting, so when they sprung the painting on me, why it really hit me like a ton of bricks, and for one time I didn't have much to say.

George . . . wanted to know what the cowboys wore forty years ago [for his illustrations], and I told him. Well now, for example, these two cowboys, [in the painting] they have vests on. They have shirts, and one of 'em has sleeve holders. Well, in those days you bought a shirt and the sleeve lengths were all the same. A short-armed guy like Bob, he had to get a pair of sleeve holders to hold his sleeves up. These shirts had a little picadilly pocket in 'em that wouldn't hold anything much, so these cowboys would hunt up an old vest, you know, from an old suit, and that'd hold their cigarette papers and their tobacco and their matches and so on. Of course, the vest wore out pretty badly in the brush, but you could always find another old vest all the time, 'cause you bought a suit of clothes in those days you bought a coat and vest and pants. You had to take the vest whether you wanted it or not.

Now, the rigging of these two cowboys, of course they're Yavapai County, and most of the Yavapai County men were, in my time at least, were centers, that is center-fire saddles, or dally-welte men. When they caught something they took their dallys around the saddle horn instead of tying hard and fast. Well in this painting, old Bob Heckle he's caught the Devil and he's takin' his dallys. And if you look real close at the painting, you'll see just a little smoke comin' off the saddle horn, cause those dallys are on there and that devil's pretty heavy.

Both men, their horses, they have spade bits. Well the center-fire cowboys usually used the spade bits, you know, and solid reins. So you see them, and I mentioned that Buster Jig—supposed to be me—Buster Jig was using a riata, which is a braided rawhide rope. Old Sandy Bob, he's using a sego. A sego was a grass rope. We called 'em segos 'cause they were supposed to be made out of sea grass. They weren't, they were made out of manila, and the real name of the ropes was Plymouth Yacht line. Of course, all the cowboys today and most of them now use nylon. But that was the idea, and these outfits, both the cowboys, you notice, on their stirrups will have tapaderos. Tapaderos are stirrup coverings which [are] protection against the brush. If you ride in this country without tapaderos, why you may have a fine pair of boots but they'll come out as a beautiful suede if you wear 'em in the brush for about a week, because it'll make suede leather out of 'em. That brush'll eat 'em up!

So both of 'em have tapaderos. And the saddles, of course, are of the time. There's a breast collar on one of these horses. Bob

Heckle's horse has a breast collar. Breast collars didn't come in until about 1920. The first breast collar I used was an old buggy britchen'. I had a little old horse, I couldn't keep the saddle on him, it'd slide backwards and slide forwards, and so I hunted up an old buggy britchen' and put it on him for a breast collar. Well now, almost all the cowboys today have breast collars on their saddles, and most of 'em even in Yavapai now use the double-cinch saddles and the breast collar. Don't draw anything very tight. It'll all hold together real fine.

Their boots, the early boots, were Buckingham and Hecht boots. Made of rather soft leather, and when your boots got old, you could cut 'em up and make strings and make a bosal for a hackamore out of those old boot tops. Now, the boots are all stitched up and you couldn't make anything out of 'em!

Well, those leather cuffs [on their sleeves]. I haven't seen a pair of them for 35, 40 years. But all the cowboys used to wear cuffs. One thing, they kept your sleeve out of your dallys. And also, in the Sierry Petes, the Sierra Prieta Mountains, there's a lot of locust [shrubs]. The locusts have long wicked thorns. Well you hit a patch of locusts when you're after something and you just throw those cuffs up in front of your face and the leather protects you. If they were just cloth, just the jumper of your shirt, why the locusts'd tear 'em off of you, but you have little cuffs that'll protect 'em. Then, another thing, your cuffs served as a sort of a memorandum. You were working on a rodeo somewhere, and you didn't know all the irons and earmarks, why you'd take your knife and just scratch the iron and the earmark on your

cuff, so if any calf broke out of the rodeo, or the barrera [fence], and you had to brand him, why you'd know what brand and earmark to put on him.

A rodeo, you notice I pronounce it ro-day'-o, which is a Spanish pronunciation, and it means roundup. I believe the verb is ro-day'-ar. I'm not very well versed in Spanish. The cowboys of Yavapai County in my day, they called it ro-deer'. Well, it'd be ro-deer'. "The ro-deer'll be in Williamson Valley next week." Or, "The ro-deer'll be in Skull Valley tomorrow", that sort of thing. It was pronounced "ro-deer" but it came from ro-day-ar. Oh, incidentally, I spoke about the dallys, you know, takin' these dallys. The word "dallys" comes from the Spanish expression, "dar la vuelta"; give a turn. Well, 'course the cowboys made that "dally-welte." Dally-welte was about as close as they could come to it, which is all right.

Spanish or Mexican influence was very strong in Yavapai County. Some of our finest cowboys were Mexican or Mexican origin. Like Yaqui [Epifanio "Yaqui" Ordunez]. He was one of the finest old boys ever lived. He was a top-notch cowboy and all those Spanish expressions, why we knew about them and we used them. All the names, the nomenclature of your saddle, you know, your stirrup leathers, your rosaderos, tapaderos. Of course, the cinch, the saddle cinch was a cincha, and all those things that the Yavapai County cowboys just adopted all these Mexican terms.

