

WYOMING LEATHER:
AN ALMANAC OF WYOMING SADDLE BUSINESSES AND WYOMING
SADDLEMAKERS, 1860-1930

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Victoria A. Smith

Lincoln, Nebraska

May 2007

UMI Number: 3275062

PREVIEW

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DISSERTATION TITLE

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Makers, 1860-1930

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Roger Blomquist

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University of Nebraska, 2007

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After analyzing census records, business directories, secondary writings and personal writings, certain characteristics of Wyoming saddle makers begin to emerge. These are not rigid characteristics, but are fluid through time, meaning that the saddle maker of 1870 was different than in 1930. Throughout the era he was a man on the move, rarely appearing in business directories or census records for long. There was no single person who represented or typified the average saddle maker because even as the country was changing, so was the man. The only constants were that he was a white male who could read and write. Wyoming saddle makers came from many places in the United States and Europe; whenever possible, a biography has been included. Some of these men embraced advanced technology, others not. Some of these men are historically well known, with more information available for them than the majority, but the Wyoming saddle maker of 1870 was a different man than the one of 1930, just as his fellow citizens were different. Immigration and family settlement patterns evolved and this change was reflected in the saddle makers' lives.

PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the women at the Wyoming State Archives for patiently and repeatedly answering my questions and for showing me how to do the simple tasks. Their cheerfulness helped me continue hour after hour of headache-inducing business directory and census record searches. Also along the same lines are the rotating staff members of Brigham Young University's Family History Library as they too answered my same questions over and over again. I would like to acknowledge and thank my friends in Cheyenne, Doug and Vicki, who have become family, for feeding and housing me during my frequent visits while exhausting all informational leads at the archives.

One nontraditional acknowledgement I would like to give is to True West magazine for awarding me the "Best Western Saddlemaker of 2005" which has opened research doors for me and raised certain individuals respect level for me making this project much easier. Another is to Fenton Quinn, who hired me as a horse wrangler and wagon driver for motion pictures, which started me on this academic adventure. Who would have thought that making Western movies would have sent me to school to start at ground zero to fight my way through all the degrees to obtain the coveted Ph.D. One great thing that Fenton did for me was to convince the producer who was filming the IMAX version of Lewis and Clark, that he truly needed me as an animal handling assistant so that I could work on that particular film. I had to miss a month of graduate school to do it, so Fenton let me hide in the truck or under trees to feverously read in between shots. I would also like to thank and acknowledge my friend, riding partner, and mischievous cohort, Dennis Rocks. We spent countless miles in the saddle riding the Old

West, countless trips in the truck driving from one historical adventure to another, and countless hours on movie sets trying to play without getting yelled at too much. . . .it did not always work. It was his driving love of history, adventure, and well-matched sense of humor that helped me maintain my focus and passion for the brass ring. There is always room for you in my lodge at my fire.

Academically there are so many to thank. Perhaps the easiest way is to thank the entire history department at both the University of Nebraska –Lincoln and Brigham Young University for giving me tremendous support throughout the years. Julie Radle, as always, you have been a salvation because you always had an answer for me and an open door when I needed a comrade so I could vent. Dr. James Garza, you showed me enormous compassion and service when I was in both the United States and Mexico. You not only added tremendously to the adventure's spice, but you were an example that I strive to follow. Dr. John Wunder, you believed in me even when I did not fit into the traditional academic mold and kept me going. I have developed tremendous respect for you because of the way you treated me through this process, and I thank you for it. Dr. Kurt Kinbacher, you always treated me as if I had already achieved the things I was still struggling to do. Having you for an officemate was one of the best things that could have happened to me and I hope that one day I can repay you for what you have done. I am proud to call you friend. Dr. Fred Gowans, you have turned from mentor to family and I could never have done this without you. Thank you for your guidance and for treating me as family. I know that my family loves and appreciates you as much as I do. Dr. Victoria Smith, I fear I lack the words of my heart. Of all the people that I met in Nebraska, our paths were closest to being the same and we found kindred spirits within

each other. More than anybody, you led me through the doctoral process and gave me your example laced with compassion, deep friendship, and companionship that helped me find my way through many difficulties. I pray that I may repay you in some way for what you have done. May your path always walk close to mine.

On the family front, I have had unfaltering love and support from all my siblings and parents. While I do not feel that I could have done all of this without them, in their humility they claim that they only made my journey a little easier. Through this I have developed a much greater understanding and love for them. I imagine that age has a lot to do with this, but I also find that I am seeing my parents so much clearer than before I started this process. The classroom helped some with this, but I would say that it was the outside effects that the classroom had that helped me grow to this point.

Without a doubt, the best thing to come from this educational experience was my wife Angela and her daughter, Frankie. When I came back from language training in Oaxaca, Mexico, I moved in next door to her, met her, and that was all it took. She has been and continues to be the foundation in my life upon which I continually build. I am a much better man for being with her and I look forward to many years of adventure and discovery with both of them.

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PREVIEW

Chapter 1

An Almanac of Wyoming Saddling

On a small stand in a dark room, a lone saddle sits in the house of Harold Mapes' widow. Near the Snake River and in the evening shadows of the Grand Teton Mountains, this quiet house is part of the Triangle X Ranch. Harold was born about 1884 and worked along the United States-Mexican Border transporting undocumented immigrants back to their homeland. Later he joined the Mexican Revolution to fight at the side of Pancho Villa. He rode in this saddle while he fought south of the border, having three horses shot out from under him. The saddle still bears a hole where one of these horses was shot through the leather skirt. The horse, while shot, was still able to get Harold back to the safety of camp before it died. Harold reportedly rode this saddle as the first white man to explore and map the mainland of Western Mexico and as he engaged in rodeos around Central and Western Mexico. Later he rode in it to Wyoming to settle his ranch site.¹

From their inception, saddles have reflected race, class and gender issues within the societies where they were used. By studying their makers through these lenses of race, class, and gender, we will not only be able to better understand their role in society, but that society itself. I will consider Wyoming, and will essentially focus on the issue of power in who has the power to make saddles? This leads to the follow up question of who cannot or did not make saddles? It also poses the question of which women were

¹ This story was related to the author by Harold Mapes' grandson, Harold Turner at the Triangle X Ranch in Moose, Wyoming, in August 1999.

building saddles; did white women play the same role as Native American, African-American or Mexican women, and did Native American men, African-American or Mexican men play equal roles between each other and amongst themselves?

Almanac

‘Almanac’ is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “An annual table, or (more usually) a book of tables, containing a calendar of months and days, with astronomical data and calculations, ecclesiastical and other anniversaries, besides other useful information, and, in former days astrological and astrometerological forecasts.” There is also an Arab-Spanish version “*al-manakh*,” and in 1505 Pedro de Alcala lists “*manakh, almanaque, calendario*,” in his Arabic-Castilian *Vocabulista*, but the word appears nowhere else as Arabic and the origin of the word is uncertain. *Manakh* has been identified with the Latin word *manacus* or *manachus*, which is the circle in a sundial showing the months or zodiac symbols. The earliest extant use in print was c. 1391 when Chaucer described “A table of the verray moeuing of the mone from howre to howre, every day and in every signe, after this almenak [sic].” In 1590 Shakespeare, in *Midsummer’s Night Dream*, wrote “Doth the moone shine that night wee play our play? A calender, a calender! Looke in the almanack find out the mooneshine [sic].” N.III. i. 54.² While Cowboy saddlemakers are certainly not celestial bodies, this almanac falls under the category of calendar tables of “other useful information” since the census information is broken down by decades and the makers listed alphabetically. Another

² *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically, Volume I, A-O*. Oxford University Press 1971, Third printing, New York, 1973, p. 61.

difference is that all the information in this study is looking backward while an astrometerological almanac looks forward. Regardless, since the men are listed here by census year 1870, 1880, (1890 was destroyed by fire, there was no Territory of Wyoming census in 1860) 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930, this comfortably fits the above definition as tables of useful information. On first perusal, it may appear that this fits more comfortably into the encyclopedia category, but upon further inspection it will be noticed that this project's focus is far too narrow and divided by timeframe not category; thus the almanac.

Methodology

The original scope of this project was to consider the power issues and struggles between the makers, the distributors, and finally the purchasers and riders of these saddles that were used in "Old West Wyoming."³ It was to include the aspects of race, class and gender among each of the previous groups, but as often happens, the project takes on a life of its own and leads to a different endpoint. As happened this time, the issue of Cowboy saddlemakers in Wyoming totally dominated this project to the point of complete exclusion of the other aspects. Because of time and scope considerations, the first group (Wyoming Cowboy saddle makers) was the only one considered through the lenses of race, class and gender. Regrettably, Native American saddles were not able to be included, nor were the English saddles used in the state (such as those in the Big Horn Polo Club in Sheridan since 1898)⁴, military, mountain man, or sidesaddles. Since I had

³ I use this term to define Wyoming from 1870 – 1930 since it brings to mind the era between mass Anglo settlement and mass mechanization.

⁴ Neither Native American or English Saddles were built to withstand the rigorous work practices or demands that the Cowboy stock saddle could.

written on the Wyoming Cowboy stock saddle's physical travel and evolution between 1860 and 1930 as my master's thesis and had a strong knowledge of that topic, I began my saddlemaker research there. I started in the Wyoming business directories in Cheyenne and searched each one name by name for saddle and harness makers. In those and in the remaining extant directories I found only men's names, and after that moved to the Federal Census records for Wyoming, starting with the first one in 1870 and finishing with 1930. In each of these, I read through each page line-by-line looking for saddle and harness makers. Originally I had planned to be a purist (as on my master's thesis) and only consider those who were listed as 'saddlemakers,' but soon realized that men who I knew were saddlemakers were listed as harness makers, so I had to begin again and redefine my scope. Two cases in point are Frank Meanea and the Collins Brothers, who were the two major Wyoming saddlemakers in the 1880s and 1890s. Photographs of their respective shops both have signs stating that say they were harness makers and nothing is shown about saddles (see photos in the appendix). The most logical reason I can deduce for this is even though these men were master craftsmen at making saddles, it was the harness business that brought in the most revenue allowing them to stay in business. To further illustrate this point are the terms used for Cowboy in the 1900 census: cattle grower, cowboy, cattle herder, cattle man, stock drover, stock grower, breaking horses, ranch laborer, stock rancher, stockman, cow puncher, herder stock, stock raiser, range rider, and (in 1910) range herder. Between the business directories and the Census records, I searched between 750,000 to 1,000,000 names to find these men.

I chose Wyoming for the simple reasons that first, it is a geo-political entity with finite workable boundaries; second, it was the meeting place for many different saddle

styles and influences and could easily be considered the “Saddle Crossroads of the North American continent;” and third, it has more known makers who have influenced the Western saddle as we have it today than any other state. The dates, chosen to create a workable finite period, begin with the early Anglo Cowboy immigration (1860s) and industry development in the state and end with the rise of mechanization (1930), which coincided with the saddlemakers’ decline.

Chapter Two is a topic introduction to saddles and their roles in society and will look at the rider’s class and position in society when possible, their race, and, by default, their gender as well. It will illuminate the people’s caliber or their societies by how they treated their horses and the role that horses and saddles played in their life. It will be noticed, as is seen today, that horses belonging to the higher social classes were generally better cared for and pampered than those belonging to the lower classes who had to worry more about hunger or debtor’s prison than preening horses. Not much is said about saddlemakers of old, so we must look at the world they helped to create by observing those who were in it. To a slight extent it will look at the mechanical aspect of saddles, but only as a vehicle to assist the reader’s journey and understanding into a new field. These mechanics are in no way addressed exhaustively here, nor is it the intention to do so, since this is a study of humanity and cultures. It is hoped that the information in that chapter will aid the reader to better understand the nuances and happenstances to come. The better we can understand saddles, horses, and their roles, the better we can understand their makers.

In the absence of saddlemaker biographers throughout time, this second chapter looks over the time that mankind has been riding horses with the idea that what the

people expected from their horses reflected who they were, and within that people the further delineations of class and economic standing. It also considers the saddles and riding traditions in order to try in some small part to understand these elusive saddlemakers by looking at what their hands crafted. With this in mind, it looks at the Arabs and Berbers as great desert riding people. It also considers Spain as a similar situation to Wyoming as meeting places of different riding styles (Moorish from the south and European from the North in Spain, and Texas and California in Wyoming). These groups were chosen because they all had a direct impact on what happened in Wyoming.

All of Wyoming's Cowboy culture derived in one form or another from Spanish traditions, either through Texas and Colorado or from California, and that tradition had been heavily influenced by the Moorish occupation of Spain during the crusades. The Native Americans were already in residence when the Cowboy culture arrived and they used a blended system of riding that combined Spanish styles modified with local innovation to better suit their particular needs. In these native cultures the women made the saddles, having some determination as to their construction, while in Western Anglo settings the women were merely buffeted by the styles dictated by society, and not by need or function. It was this second chapter that spurred the creation of a glossary since many terms used therein are either obsolete in our culture today, or of foreign origin and not used by us at any time.

Chapter Three narrows from the global perspective down to the North American continent and the last 400 years. It continues to define the crux of this project to create a pointed explanation showing why this study material and written information are of

scholastic value. It revisits the question of ‘Why Wyoming?’ and expands to ‘What to do with Wyoming,’ generating the in-depth scope this project took to explore and discover the common characteristics that these saddlemakers shared, what bound them together, and what kept them apart. The mainline characteristic these men shared is that each one had an ability to work (and to a great extent understand) leather. Looking from a personal and biased point of view, I would say that they also had a great love for leather, but it is quite possible that some were merely making a living at whichever opportunity had a ready paycheck. Also included is a bibliographical essay that lists and explains the major secondary and primary information available on Western saddles and their makers.

Chapter Four is a listing of various Wyoming business directories between the years of 1860 and 1930. Most are housed in the Wyoming State Archives in Cheyenne, but many are kept in libraries throughout the state. The list is not complete simply for the fact that many have not been kept over the years. The listings as presented in this chapter are taken verbatim, thus accounting for the informational differences and lack of uniformity between each listing group.

Chapter Five consists of biographies for the individual men who were listed as saddle or harness makers in the extant census records between 1870 and 1930. The census forms changed for each decade, making a point-by-point comparison impossible. Thus, listed for each individual is as much information as was given for each period. Also listed is information about the surrounding neighbors with the idea that we can better understand each man by the people he lived with. If his neighbors were physicians or merchants with servants, then it would suggest that he was financially successful, but if he lived among common laborers, chances are he was not as skilled or fortunate as

others. Unfortunately, many conclusions will be drawn with the handicap of a hundred years separation and far too incomplete information, but the intent and spirit of this project is to create a 'forensic casting' of the individuals involved. Understandably, in new discovery there is always error, which is a looming fact for this study, but with time, others can build upon this new foundation to create a more complete and solid structure for those to come.

Chapter Six is a simplified saddlemaker list comprising the city where they operated and within which years. In order to make this list more useful, it is divided into two sections. First the saddlemakers are listed alphabetically with cities/areas and dates. In the second section the saddlemakers are again listed alphabetically by the cities/areas within which they operated, thus making it much easier to compare makers geographically. This information was taken from a multitude of sources ranging from the aforementioned census records and business directories to, in one particular case, the saddle itself with a saddlemaker's stamp (consisting of the maker's name and city/state of operation) of an individual for whom there is no printed record. It is meant only as a central list where all the names found have been gathered for a quick and easy reference to more easily compare individuals, locales, and time frames. Understandably, this constitutes the men of record who were found, and regrettably does not (nor cannot) include those range workers who made saddles and harnesses for ranches, never had their names in a business directory, or were not at home when the census takers performed their duty.

Chapter Seven takes all the previous statistical information and molds it together to form their commonalities into a single representative individual. In order to do this, I

created separate composites based on each census record. This was necessary because the saddlemaker's identity changed from decade to decade, hence the 1870 makeup differed substantially from the 1930 makeup. Regardless of these differences, there were still many commonalities that transcended the years, creating the quintessential saddlemaker's characteristics. After the mockups are several individual sketches that further flesh out a few men. Unfortunately, this common man did not leave sufficient individual records behind for us to find, so these men represent the more prosperous employers and not the common man.

Included at the end is an appendix consisting of maps, photographs and a glossary defining terms used in Chapters Two and Three that are foreign to our language today or are part of the equestrian cultures and considered 'industrial terms.' At the end is the bibliography.

PREVIEW

Chapter 2

4000 Years of Leather

“When you mount a horse, always speak these words: “In the Name of God.” The grave of the rider is always open.”⁵

History

What the people expected from their horses reflected who they were.

According to Arab legend, even as God made man from clay, He made the horse from the South Wind, which was the symbol of speed. After God told the wind to condense, the Angel Gabriel took a handful and presented it to Him. He immediately created a brown bay (or burnt chestnut) and called him Horse.⁶ “I make you Arabian and I give you the Chestnut color of the ant; I have hung happiness from the forelock which hangs between your eyes; you shall be the lord of the other animals. Men shall follow you wherever you go; you shall be as good for pursuit as for flight; you shall fly without wings; riches shall be on your back and fortune shall come through your mediation.”⁷

Archaeologists have not been able to find any written record of mankind riding horseback before the nineteenth century BC, and that reference stated that the son of King Zimri-Lin was advised by his father not to degrade himself in doing so, but that he

⁵ General E. Daumas, *The Horses of the Sahara*, ninth ed. (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1968), 144.

⁶ Brown bay and burnt chestnut are variations of brown horses. The horse’s color is used as its designation, thus a cowboy would ride a “paint,” “buckskin,” “bay,” or other color-termed horse.

⁷ General E. Daumas, *The Horses of the Sahara*, ninth ed. (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1968), 7. This was originally written by General Melchior Joseph Eugene Daumas of the French colonial army and was first published in 1850.

should travel by chariot or mule.⁸ Later records show that the Greeks rode with their legs virtually straight, or long, not as if they were riding in a chair. The idea was to ride as if the person were standing up with his feet parted. It is claimed that riders then have a better grip on the horse with their thighs and create more force while hurling the javelin, thus making them more able to strike from horseback. While this was popular with the Greeks, it was not used to the exclusion of riding with legs slightly bent, or fully bent as sitting in a chair. It is this straight-legged feature that the Western style of riding derived from, and was popular in English riding until the twentieth century. Unlike the Persians, the Greeks did not ride with saddles or padding, but rode bareback without any kind of trousers. This made a skin-to-hide contact which, once the horse began sweating, created a strong adhesive property to help the rider stay mounted. This is similar to the way many Plains Native Americans rode for more than a century.⁹

The Roman and Persian saddles were a simple felt pad laid across the horse's spine underneath the rider's bottom and secured by a girth, evenly distributing the rider's weight. This became a problem because it rested on the horse's ribcage and spine, causing wear and discomfort. The Scythians rode with a six foot felt saddlecloth under the saddle, which was folded over while being ridden and then laid flat at night as a blanket. Their saddle was an improvement on the aforementioned ones because it had two two-foot long and well stuffed pads which rested on each side of the spine and were joined by cross straps. This meant that any horse, regardless of weight gain or loss, could be ridden in greater comfort, which meant longer rides and greater range.¹⁰

⁸ Charles Chenevix Trench, *A History of Horsemanship* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 12.

⁹ Ibid., 27-29.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48-49.

The stirrup was an advantageous invention for many reasons. One is that it became much easier for the rider to mount the horse. It also made it easier for the rider to run with the horse because his/her weight is not immediately in contact, but slightly suspended above, preventing the rider from interfering with the horse's momentum. There is the more obvious and simple advantage to stirrups when one is trotting the horse. It keeps the riders from jarring their insides and from bruising the horse's back while bouncing up and down. It also creates a more stable platform for the mounted archer, who has less range than a foot archer but greater mobility to strike.¹¹

Leather stamping,¹² on saddles is of Moorish origin and dates back to before their invasion into Spain in the eighth century AD. Along with horses and saddles, it was brought to the New World where it was easily adopted by local populations, such as the Aztecs, who were already greatly skilled in working precious metals to create golden figurines and jewelry. It was then brought north from Mexico into the American West, especially to California and Wyoming, where it was taken to its height as an art form.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 65-66.

¹² Leather stamping is the process of wetting leather and using a stylus or a hammer and design tool to create a pattern on the leather surface. Once the pattern is finished, it is left to dry so that it will become permanently indented in the leather. Since the process of stamping compressed the leather fibers, besides being visually attractive, this makes the leather more resilient to water damage caused by rain or river crossings.

¹³ Robert M. Denhardt, *The Horse of the Americas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma 2nd ed. 1975), 137-8. During the early nineteenth century Spanish California had beautifully stamped saddles that were much more elegant than the saddles produced on the plains. Today in Wyoming, Don King is the undisputed master of the famed Sheridan style of leather stamping, which has been copied by countless other saddlemakers. It is a very intricate floral design requiring great skill and time to create and reproduce. Don King has received many awards, including *True West Magazine's* reader's choice Best Western Saddlemaker 2005, and has been written about in numerous saddle books.