



SO FAR AND YET SO CLOSE: FRONTIER CATTLE RANCHING IN WESTERN PRAIRIE CANADA AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA
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CONCLUSION: THE FRONTIER LEGACY

While the family was emerging as the main unit of production on the ranch/farms in western Canada, corporations continued to predominate in the Northern Territory. To say this is not to suggest that the family did not have a place in the historical development of the industry in the outback too. First, though there were obviously far fewer family groups generally in the three extremely sparsely populated grazing districts, there were actually more family runs in the Alice Springs area than company runs. A biographer once, quite appropriately, described the families throughout that region with admiration as “battlers” because they eventually made a go of it where the corporations could not.¹ Living as they did in a “new land,” lacking extended kinship networks, close neighbours, all luxuries, and most conveniences, they struggled from the beginning to keep their operations going – but the successful ones struggled together. In the Hayes case, every hand counted and the five siblings were expected to contribute in every possible way from an early age. The two girls participated every bit as much as the three boys, and they did not hesitate to cross gender boundaries, as indicated in the following conversation between William and a reporter:

—I understand you acknowledge your daughters to be as good as yourself on the station?

—I do, indeed. There is no phase of bush and station life that they are unable to tackle. There is nothing of the type of girls who want to drive out on Sundays about them. They are thorough horsewomen, with or without saddles, and can muster cattle with the best men I ever had.

—Can they shoe a horse?

—Of course they can shoe a horse. That's easy.

—Can they brand cattle?

—Yes; and shoot and dress a beast when the beef has run out. They also break in colts and go out for a week or two at anytime with a couple of lubras mustering cattle. They think nothing of camping under the stars and, in fact, can do anything with stock that men can do.

William knew his daughters were mentally tough as well. “I can tell you that if they were bosses of a station things would have to be carried out their way.”² When his children were old enough William built up his holdings by establishing them all on separate runs. In 1913 John was at Undoolya, William Junior at Owen Springs, Edward at Mount Burrell, and Miasa and Mary (Adams nee Hayes) were at Maryvale station with the elder couple.³

The following story recounted by a stockman in 1905 illustrates that, on the family operations that did exist in northern Australia, collaboration between man and wife during hard times could bring to the fore the same desperate strategy for fending off creditors as in the Canadian West.

I was present during the 1900 drought in the taking over by the mortgagees of a station away out. The owner of the property was a married man, and his wife possessed stock in her own name, and these were running on the station with her husband's cattle. When the representative of the mortgagees arrived I was at the station taking delivery of a mob of horses bred by the wife of the station-owner, and I went out

with the muster when the first camp was put on. As soon as the cattle were steadied down and the chap who was taking delivery rode in amongst them to have a look through the lot, the station head stockman began “cutting out” for all he was worth. This naturally excited the curiosity of the mortgagee’s representative, who asked him what he was at. The reply came quick and prompt, “Oh, only cutting out a few of Mrs.’s cattle.” Then many more questions were asked, and brands and ear-marks were referred to and discussed but the result was that when Mrs.’s cattle were cut out of the mob, very few remained for the mortgagees. The reason was easily explained. After the mortgage was given over the property, the wife’s brand was the only one used on the station.⁴

While the big corporations in the Victory River and Tableland districts were more dependent than those around Alice on outside hired labour, in some cases a man and wife co-managed. At Urapunga, John and Kate Warrington Rogers were equally reliant on each other in an operational sense.⁵ A reporter once visited the station when John was away droving cattle to a distant market. “This droving takes from ten to eleven months every year,” he wrote, “and during this time Mrs. Warrington Rogers, with her staff of lubras is in sole charge of the station. This means that for months at a time the lady is out mustering and branding her beasts, building cattle yards, rounding up ‘fats’ for the markets and attending to the hundred and one other jobs of a big station.”⁶ What Kate “does not know about cattle station management is not worth bothering about,” one well-known neighbouring grazier commented. “If energy, daring, fine horsemanship, nerve, and shrewd common sense are qualities to make a capable cattle station manager, then this remarkable lady” is “well up to the mark and to her reputation.” When asked if “she did not at times feel nervous in such lonely and dangerous surroundings and living solely with ‘lubras,’” she replied, “nervous! It would not do for me to be silly and nervous; and besides, I have no time to be nervous, there is always so much to do and it must be done.”⁷

One attribute the rancher/farmers in western Canada and the graziers in northern Australia seem almost all to have shared throughout their history is a similar level of economic attainment. That is to say, neither has

been able to consistently show healthy annual profits. In the mid-1960s the average farm income in the Alice Springs region was \$-4,109, in the Barkly Tableland region, \$38,344, and in the Victoria River district, \$34,193.⁸ The Alice Springs area was in the midst of a three-year rainfall shortage, so for it the figures may be abnormally low. However, climatic conditions in the other two districts were about average. Considering that 50 percent of the stations were running 15,000-plus cattle and all were leasing huge areas of land and maintaining a sizeable labour force, the percentage return on investment was very low indeed.⁹ Dependable figures for the Canadian West are hard to find until more recent times. However, those supplied by statistics Canada indicate that from 2005 to 2009 average net operating income from agricultural production for the 30,000 or so family farms (and ranch/farms) in Alberta varied from \$16,292 to \$22,935 while off-farm income ran from \$79,307 to \$94,509.¹⁰ In Saskatchewan average net operating income for the 25,000 or so farms varied from \$13,352 to \$31,145 while off-farm income ran from \$58,474 to \$75,301.¹¹ To put what this means in blunt terms – the average farm family would have been living in abject poverty were it not for the fact that its members were able to take paid outside work.

The truth is that for most of the producers in the two areas of concern in this study, survival rather than wealth has always been the primary objective. In a sense these rancher/farmers have endured despite, rather than because of, their natural setting. It is evident that the frontier period was when survival proved most elusive and when the means by which it was most likely to be achieved had to be worked out. One of the outstanding features of frontiers pretty much anywhere is that the incoming peoples have a relatively poor understanding of the new area's qualities and, therefore, they will make mistakes and are liable to fail at an inordinate rate, historically speaking. In that respect the frontier works with nature to put limits on success. The first big Canadian ranchers were not familiar enough with their surroundings to understand that a grazing system that had shown great potential in the Deep South would not work on the northern extremities of the Great Plains. They had to learn that the winters were too severe, predation too widespread, the mange too persistent, and the grass not nearly productive enough to sustain grazing on the levels they anticipated. The first pastoralists in the Northern Territory had a better grasp of the weather-related factors in their country's hinterlands,

but they also underestimated the magnitude of problems such as unforeseeably coarse grasses, scarcity of accessible natural water sources, disease, duffers, and racial conflict.

The extent to which, from the beginning, the frontier worked with Nature not just to exacerbate economic failure but also to shape the overall development of the cattle industry on both continents must be acknowledged. The Canadians chose the Texas system for the northern Great Plains to some degree because of the rich rough fescue grasslands that naturally abounded there. However, they were persuaded to embrace the idea of open range grazing in part because that was the easiest and cheapest way to get started in an undeveloped region that had no infrastructure. Moreover, while the elements did much to force the big ranchers out of business, it was to a considerable degree because the unrefined, open range system subjected their herds unreasonably to extremes of weather, predation, and disease and also because it made selective and controlled breeding impractical. It was for the same reasons that the movement to family ranching/farming was necessary. The Australian pastoralists were also attracted to the Northern Territory by the grasslands but they too unquestionably saw the open range system as the course of least resistance. It subjected their cattle to Nature's destructive power as well, mainly in the form of long periods of tremendous heat and little rain. In reaction they had to upgrade their facilities somewhat, mainly by incorporating increasing numbers of man-made water sources and, particularly in the Alice Springs district, by managing their stock more closely. On both continents the cattlemen also had to respond to low population density and their remote situation – the Canadians by supplying store cattle over land and sea to European farmers and the Australians by largely walking their stock to grain growers via Charleville, Hergott Springs, and Oodnadatta.

Despite its impact throughout the American West as well as in Australia and Canada, the frontier as a concept, as noted above, is largely absent from modern historiography. North American historians have basically given up talking about it: Americans in part because they feel that Fredrick Jackson Turner's work is passé if not discredited, Canadians because the concept is too American;¹² and Australian historians have treated their frontiers almost solely as a place where invading and indigenous races met, mingled, and clashed. In these societies, however, its attributes not only affected virtually all aspects of life in its day but they

cast a shadow over time that continues to be felt through to the present. Arguably that shadow could be seen for years in political/constitutional, gender, and religious developments.¹³ Such subjects are outside the scope of this study, but a few more words can appropriately be said about cultural manifestations. In that general area the frontier's influence is still palpable. The rough and unruly crew culture has been tempered on both ends of the globe as the institutions of law and order and the family have become stronger. However, in some noticeable respects, pioneering customs and traditions endure.

To grasp how these customs and traditions first became entrenched, we need to be cognizant of the process of selection the frontier imposed on the society of its day. Some types of people it rejected and others it not only accepted but actually raised to heroic stature. The ones it tended to reject were those who people considered to be the most firmly restrained by Old World values. In western Canada, people felt that their society was virtually the antithesis of that in the East or overseas. Whereas the latter were refined and sophisticated, and catered to the polite and courteous, the West was rough-hewn, rugged, and both mentally and physically demanding. It thus militated against the sort of new arrivals who were unable, for whatever reason, to thoroughly alter their ways. "Though the spirit of sheer adventure has sent many young men to Canada, and there made good and contented Canadians of them," many are not "of the quality that wears well," warned a writer from London after a visit to Calgary in 1904. "Among the derelicts . . . in the west," there were "young fellows whose sole equipment was manifestly their spirit of adventure. They hung about the town looking picturesque and with . . . leggings and cowboy hats on, inept . . . and waiting for some pleasant leisure for shooting prairie chicken or catching trout."¹⁴ Some westerners learned to look with deep suspicion on almost anyone from the East but particularly Great Britain. "After residing here and reading your newspapers for a few months past, it would seem to me many take a deep delight in fanning the flames of hatred towards the British nation," Alfred Cross wrote in 1895. It was, he felt, "a pity one has to carry back such an opinion to one's native land to harm the respect and friendship due so great a nation."¹⁵ From time to time employers advertised job openings with the stipulation "no English need apply."¹⁶ In most cases, such prejudices were directed towards a very specific kind of Englishman. He was the spoiled, well-heeled "remittance

man” who had been sent west by his family because he was an embarrassment at home. The West was supposed to encourage him to mend his childish and indolent lifestyle. Stories about remittance men were commonly repeated in the newspapers and in the correspondence of people who became part of the ranching fraternity.

Time and again they reiterated the opinion that “such chaps should be kept at home.”¹⁷ They were convinced that too many young men who were relatively well-to-do, physically weak, and naive about the workings of the world had come out from the mother country. Most were not just awkward and out of place but predestined to fail in a land where only the strongest could compete. “The slow-moving brains of some, the lack of initiative, of originality, marked the general run of them as hopeless for Western life, where necessity is ever forcing and developing the inventive genius, the adaptability, and the power to make one thing do work for a dozen other articles.”¹⁸ Unquestionably, there was a bias here but there seemed to be lots of evidence to support it. Numerous disparaging eyewitness comments came from British ranchers themselves. Monica Hopkins, who along with her husband had a 640-acre ranch near Millarville, was one. Her descriptions of her rather pathetic neighbours, named Bolts, painted a grim picture. “I never would have believed that anyone could live in such discomfort in such an appalling place if I hadn’t seen it for myself,” she told one of her fellow countrymen.

The house built by Mr. Bolts is of course built of logs, the ends of which have never been cut off and stick out at various angles at each corner. The roof has a dip in the middle and the stovepipe sticks out like a crooked handle. Instead of plaster or moss between the logs, odd bits of newspapers have been shoved in [and from the inside] the daylight could be seen between most of the logs. . . . Mr. Bolts is hopeless out here, so stupid and ignorant of anything connected with country life. In Manchester where he comes from he would probably be quite an ordinary young man, dressed in blue serge and a bowler hat and travelling by train or bus to an office.¹⁹

David Warnock wrote of a ranch hand named Brown who wanted badly to go back to England. “Out of wages paid him since coming here I don’t

think he has saved a dollar!" Warnock said. "He lost one cheque by giving it to" a fellow worker and countryman, "to take to town and get it cashed for him." The man "went to town, cashed the cheque, got drunk, stayed in town and spent the money."²⁰ They never saw him again.

Story after story recounted British business failures too. D.H. Andrews told of a man who "could not make a success grazing cattle and sold out at a loss." He had allowed himself to become so broke that when he "took the opportunity to go home" he was forced to ride with the cattle "in order to save the expense of paying for railroad tickets and passage on a steamer."²¹ In 1903 the *Calgary Herald* published an article on a well-known British experiment – the Barr Colony – proclaiming that its colonists are "Rich in Everything Except Knowledge of Their New Condition in Life." The author's main conclusion was that "Education leads to Disillusion."²² Such examples were so numerous that at least one school was started to provide young Britons with a realistic idea of what to expect and how to cope. Someone told Cross in 1906 of a scheme to bring together "the members of the British public schools in Canada" to help and advise them. He liked the idea. "We have a large proportion of public school men coming from the British Isles," he told the people behind the scheme. "Many of them do not seem to get along very well owing to their lack of knowledge of what is required to make a success in the new country."²³

Comparing attitudes towards the British with those towards Americans provides a sharp and interesting contrast. Anyone who searches the correspondence of this era or reads the newspapers cannot help but be impressed by the high esteem in which Americans were held because of their affinity for, and ability to deal with, conditions peculiar to the cattle industry. Few cases of American failure were cited by contemporaries, while a disproportionate number of success stories centred on families such as the McIntyres or men like E.H. Maunsell, John Franklin, John Ware, George Emerson, or D.H. Andrews who were born or had spent a considerable portion of their lives south of the border. All of them had worked cattle either as hired hands or as owners and were thus equipped to deal with all the challenges associated with establishing the beef industry.

One British rancher who came to the Canadian West in the 1880s after living for a considerable period of time in California, Arizona, Mexico, and Texas estimated that by 1886 "and prior to that date some of the ranch managers were Americans, all the foremen, nearly all the

cowboys, nearly all the cattle and horses, all the saddles, rifles, revolvers and cowboy outfit in general were American.”²⁴ Specific examples of British and Eastern owners hiring Americans to manage their herds are numerous. The Walrond brought in James Patterson from Montana as foreman.²⁵ The Bar U contacted the Montana Cattle Association to acquire George Lane.²⁶ Responsibility for the Cochrane cattle at Waterton was eventually turned over to James Dunlap.²⁷ E.C. Johnson, who took “charge of the Bar U herds for some years,” worked for D.H. Andrews “both in Wyoming and this country.” He was a “first rate cow man, in fact about the best all round cow man” around.²⁸ Andrews himself had many years’ experience on the American ranching frontier before he came north to manage the Stair outfit for British owners. Frank Strong, who came to Alberta from Montana in 1880, ran the I.G. Baker stock business while operating a horse ranch of his own.²⁹ John Ware is one of many American cowboys who helped make up the most highly skilled segment of the day-to-day labour force. Because he was black, Ware had always felt threatened by vigilante groups in the United States that commonly hanged men suspected of cattle rustling. However, his decision to stay on at the Bar U was also undoubtedly because his expertise was in demand there, just as it had been in the south.³⁰ One of the same ranch’s most famous hands was the notorious outlaw Harry Longabaugh, better known as the Sundance Kid. He was employed to break horses in 1890 and was considered very good at the job.³¹

Americans became role models and, in time, as the frontier selection process did its work, the more capable among the non-Americans adopted their skills and know-how.³² Then admiration was transformed into an appreciation for anyone who was able to master the craft of the cowboy. In 1896 the *Montreal Witness* published an article based on an interview with Fred Stimson, then manager of the Bar U ranch. It started with a description of the superb effects of Western life on his physical condition, noting that when he had lived in Quebec he had been “a thin, delicate young man who feared consumption.” Now, after more than a decade on the ranch, he was “colossal, hearty, and humorous.” He had learned not only to “disdain . . . the ‘biled shirt’ of civilization” but also to enjoy sleeping “on the bare ground.” The article described Stimson’s deep knowledge of and faith in cattle grazing in the foothills of Alberta.³³ This sort of reasoning was endemic throughout the North American West.

After ranching himself in Montana and North Dakota, future president of the United States Theodore Roosevelt wrote that there are “very few businesses so absolutely legitimate as stock-raising and so beneficial to the nation at large.” The rancher must not only be “shrewd, thrifty, pliant, and enterprising but he must also possess qualities of personal bravery, hardihood, and self-reliance to a degree not demanded in the least by any mercantile occupation in a community long settled.” The cattlemen are “the pioneers of civilization, and their drive and adventurousness make the after settlement of the nation possible.” They are “much better fellows and pleasanter company than small farmers or agricultural labourers.” The “mechanics and workmen” of the cities should not even “be mentioned in the same breath.”³⁴

But adoration for the capable cattle frontiersman was demonstrated most forcefully in an endless number of dime and romantic novels originally published in North America and/or Great Britain, all of which in one way or another developed the theme that in the demanding and challenging setting of the West certain individuals had been transformed both physically and mentally into almost super-human beings. This was the central message in a host of works such as *The Boys of the Rincon Ranch*,³⁵ *Son of Rosario Ranch*,³⁶ *The Giant Cowboys*,³⁷ *The Chief of the Cowboys*,³⁸ *Sunset Ranch*,³⁹ and *The Virginian*, the latter by noted author Owen Wister.⁴⁰ American authors wrote most of the stories. However, their impact was equally profound on both sides of the international border. A few of the publications were Canadian. In *Sky Pilot* the acclaimed author Ralph Connor described the “Noble Seven,” a group of Britons and certain “approved colonials” who had made their way to the foothills of the Rockies where, “freed from the restraints of custom and surrounding,” they had “soon shed all that was superficial in their make-up . . . stood forth in the naked simplicity of their manhood,” and learned the ways and culture of the cowboy. “Never have I fallen in with men braver, truer or of warmer heart . . . Throughout that summer and the winter . . . I lived among them, camping on the range . . . and sleeping in their shacks, bunching cattle in the summer and hunting wolves in the winter.” Yes they went on sprees of drinking and debauchery but “through all not a man . . . ever failed to be true to his standard of honor in the duties of comradeship and brother hood.”⁴¹ So taken were the public with ranchers and cowboys that every aspect of their existence became subject to public

depiction. Aesthetic qualities were everything. In all the novels intricate descriptions painted these frontier heroes in living colour and helped to grant them legendary status.

Long dark-brown hair hung, in wavy masses, low over his well-rounded shoulders, while a goatee and mustache, silky in fineness and gloss, added to the manly beauty of his face, which was tanned by sun and wind . . . Buckskin breeches, fringed, and ornamented with silver buttons down the outer seams, were sustained about his waist by both belt and silken red sash. The breeches were thrust into the top of high-legged boots of calfskin, upon the heels of which were buckled a pair of silver spurs, with but medium-sized rowels. A blue woolen shirt, with wide collar loosely confined at the neck by a black kerchief and a black wide-brimmed sombrero, made up his . . . costume.⁴²

It is indicative of the selection process associated with the frontier environment that in Australia the public underwent exactly the same basic pattern of disdain for Old World types who could not adapt and, eventually, outright veneration for all those of any origin who could. The centre of negative comment for ineptitude were young Britons who, very much like the remittance men in Canada, were sent out to the frontier by their family in hopes that they would find themselves. The family often paid stations to take them and subject them to outback challenges. “Some of the old time pastoralists” apparently “charged as much as 200 pounds and 300 pounds per annum for allowing” them “the privilege of breaking down their shaky fences, galloping the legs off their horses after kangaroos and emus, and violently making love to their sisters, servants, daughters, cousins, and maiden aunts.”⁴³ It was widely believed that in most cases these young men in training, the so-called “jackaroos,” did not learn the trade of the stockman and stationer but ultimately, like numerous of their countrymen in North America, returned to England with little or nothing to show for their colonial experience. They were considered overindulged children from wealthy families who showed virtually no interest in living up to their parents’ hopes. “Who comes from home,

devoid of sense, to gain regardless of expense, Colonial Experience? The Jackaroo.”⁴⁴

Here too, some of these men eventually adjusted their habits to fit their New World setting. “After a few years sojourn in this sunny land of tremendous distances most of them returned to merry England to settle down in their respective spheres of respectability.” But “some . . . came out with a purpose to study pastoralism and invest capital” in the grazing business. “Many of the latter” invested wisely and were able to reap the rewards “of their studies on station properties throughout Australasia.”⁴⁵ Eventually the good and capable jackaroo shared the public stature of the career stockman, just as the best of the remittance men in Canada enjoyed the immense esteem of the American cowboy. This brought him an equal level of well-published acclamation. Though “his relatives were located in the mother land,” he was known to be “courageous as a bulldog, taciturn of speech, and a deep thinker.” He had become a true man of the outback, “born with the love of a horse, a dog, and cattle . . . of which he was an astute judge.” A “bold, fearless rider he . . . would tear through the bush at a full gallop either by day or” by night. “Every full moon he was out with two or three blackfellows, mounted his offside, as he termed” his horse, “and with a small mob of tailers” he “skirted the scrubs,” and rounded up “the semi-wild cattle” that others had been unable to capture.⁴⁶

It speaks to the universality of the frontier selection process that in Australia too writers provided an eager audience with vivid and intricate depictions of their heroes’ style and dress. Except for a few of the terms used, the following description could easily have appeared in a northern Great Plains novel.

Who has not seen either in the body, or depicted in various illustrated papers, the traditional stockman? To look at him as he stands, lightly resting his hand on the arched neck of his docile steed, is to wish to be that stockman. See him in all the glorious panoply of buckskin breeches, faultless, without a wrinkle, cabbage-tree hat, with long black sash with long scarlet pendants, kneeboots carefully greased (your traditional stockman eschews blacking), and an immaculate scarlet or pink-striped shirt! [This is the epitome of] wild freedom . . . devoted to careering on fiery steeds across boundless

plains, chasing wild cattle whose speed and ferocity are only equalled by the lion.⁴⁷

One cannot tell the whole story, however, without mentioning that the tendency for people to be captivated by the cowboy generally was an Old as well as a New World manifestation. The truth is that this noble knight of the ranges came along at precisely the right moment in history. The nineteenth century as a whole was a time when creeping industrialism and/or urbanization seemed to be blotting out the sun and creating ghastly slums in crowded centres of eastern North America, southern Australia, and a host of European cities.⁴⁸ It was no accident that as these trends gathered strength, a multitude of romantic poets with names like Byron,⁴⁹ Shelley,⁵⁰ and Wordsworth⁵¹ stated their regret at the loss of a bygone existence when people had been able to feel closer to nature. In that context, any individuals who were able to go out into the vast wilderness in distant parts of the world and handle its hardships and dangers seemed larger than life. Adventurers, explorers, big game hunters, trappers, and bushmen held a special place in the public view. Works such as G.O. Shields' *Rustlings in the Rockies: Hunting and Fishing by Mountain and Stream*,⁵² W.F. Butler's *The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the North-West of America*,⁵³ A.D. Richardson's *Beyond the Mississippi: from the Great River to the Great Ocean. Life and Adventure on the Prairies, Mountains and Pacific Coast*,⁵⁴ Giles Seagram's *Jack Halliday, Stockman: A Story of Australian Bush Life*,⁵⁵ A.B. Patterson's *The Man from Snowy River and other Verses and Old Bush Songs*,⁵⁶ along with many others sold in the thousands.⁵⁷

The able cowboy or stockman was thus just one, though quite clearly the most widely recognized, of a number of adventurous types who captured the hearts and minds of the reading public beyond as well as within the frontier environment that had made his name. So firmly was admiration for him entrenched that time would not erode his stature. Today men and women in ranching communities in Canada and Australia (and, of course, the United States) commonly aspire to his image. They regularly don wide-brimmed hats, bandanas, high-heeled riding boots, and special belts and buckles in their everyday lives. They also maintain a lexicon of their own, much of which is a carryover from the pioneer days. Terms like "axle grease" (butter), "belly wash" (weak coffee), "doggie" (calf), "buck out" (to die), "wrangler" (the guy who looks after the horses), and

“fixin’ to,” (do something) persist in western Canada, as do “jackaroo” (stockman in training), “cocky” (small grazier), “duffer” (cattle rustler), “buckjumper” (bucking horse), “roughrider” (stockman riding bucking animal), and “ringer” (very capable stockman) in Australia. This, and a particular parochial accent, set the rancher/farmers on the high plains of western Canada and the graziers in the outback of Australia apart from urbanites and regular farmers alike. Moreover, country music and cowboy poetry,⁵⁸ which developed out of young men’s attempts to entertain their fellow cowhands around the campfire when droving or rounding up in the earliest frontier days, still command a substantial following.⁵⁹ Among the performers, Lee Kernaghan and Gina Jeffreys are as popular down under as Ian Tyson, Terri Clarke, and Stompin’ Tom Connors up top. For samples of country poetry in modern times, see Appendix A below.

Perhaps nothing symbolizes the frontier today more than the resilience and vigour of the rodeo or stampede. It too originated and emanated from the time when the Texas system was first established. On the western plains of North America, spontaneous competitions of roping, racing, bucking, and/or cutting often took place during the general roundups when several ranches came together. The *Yellowstone Journal* in Montana commented on one such event in 1885. “Will G. Comstock in town from the nine-six-nine ranch reports a grand time on Saturday and Sunday at the Capital X Ranch on Mezpah Creek. Over seventy-five cowboys were present and the roping and cutting ‘matches’ both offered prize money for the winners.” People from far and wide were sometimes invited to attend. “There were race meetings . . . and, at intervals between races, roping the wild steer, riding the bronco and other events peculiar to a great stock country were indulged in.” In this manner the rodeo, first established in the American South, proliferated across the northern states and into the Canadian territories. By the early 1890s, professional cowboy athletes were appearing at these events along with local working ranch hands. A Canadian North-West Mounted Police officer recalled: “The competitors . . . had often come from a long distance and were past-masters at the games, sometimes champions of the great stock regions south of the line and in our country from the ranches in the vicinity.”⁶⁰

In Australia rodeo had its start with “campdrafting” and “rough-riding” during mustering when the stockmen were also inclined to display their riding skills and the quality of their horses.⁶¹ Stock was taken

from the cattle camps at night to compete in drafting, or cutting out. “Roughriding” evolved from these competitions. It featured bull and bronc riding and steer wrestling and eventually roping. These events started on stations in New South Wales and then spread through Queensland to the Northern Territory. We close with five photographs – the first two Australian and the other three Canadian. Only the keenest expert eye could tell which is which.



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