

**From Reality to Rodeos:
Dakota Cow Town Newspapers and the Cowboy Myth, 1877-1886**

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Introduction.

Cowboys, cattlemen, and editors during the long drive era.

Dakota Territory was at the northernmost edge of the Western Trail, the greatest cowboy cattle trail in the West between 1877 and 1885.¹ Cattle was herded from Texas north by the 99th meridian to Ogallala, Nebraska, and through that gateway to the northern plains of Montana, Wyoming, and Dakota territories.² The number of beasts brought north during the two-decade long drive era following the Civil War reached at least five million;³ it is a wonder carnivores from the East could accommodate that much beef on their tables. Apparently they liked Texas beef: “huge demand needs huge supply,” according to an 1884 report, and by then 2.5 million head had been shipped by rail from western cow towns to Chicago for processing.⁴ Kansas City and others at the eastern edge of the plains also became important meatpacking headquarters for cattlemen.

Great fortunes fed those great enterprises in the western plains. The cattle barons, as some frontier editors called the livestock financiers (sometimes a compliment, sometimes an epithet),⁵ came almost exclusively from the East and Europe to establish operations in western towns along the long-drive trails. Some Dakota Territory cattle owners came from Britain or, for the flamboyantly famous Marquis de Morès, from France.⁶ The big operators behind the cattle drives needed many herders to do the tough, logistically difficult job of moving thousands of beeves through enormous stretches to

prairie. To make the long trips from Texas to the Canadian border between 1867 and 1886, they hired an estimated 35,000 wranglers, cooks and cowboys.⁷

Why did they come, both cowboys and cattlemen? Primarily for the money. After the Civil War, Texas was economically poor, but rich in semi-wild longhorns. Northern states east of the Mississippi had cash but expensive beef. When a Kansas Pacific railhead reached Abilene in 1867, Texas cattlemen realized they had a way to ship cattle east at a profit.⁸ In fact, the profit could be enormous: at the beginning of the era, cattle barons could expect to receive 100 percent profit in three years. This diminished to more like 60 percent in four years, but still well worth the risk for many financiers.⁹

The investments spread through 1,500 miles of established cattle towns throughout the western plains. A general business rule estimated the cost of a long drive at 60 cents a head, and 80 percent of that money was spent in the cow towns along the way.¹⁰ In fact, the cattle industry at its acme dominated economy and culture of plains states after the Civil War. Observed noted western historian Robert Athearn, “They directed the social, economic and political scene for about 40 years.”¹¹

Inevitably the towns directly catering to the cowboys grew economically, but at a price: cow town leaders catered to some of the less genteel of young men engaged in one of the West’s most dangerous occupations. For those men, a night in town might be an opportunity to spend a lot, in both money and troublemaking. Cowboys took in about \$35-\$40 a month, perhaps \$60 a month for top hands,¹² but often squandered it at a dusty cow town, drinking, gambling, shooting and procuring prostitutes. “They invariably get drunk and become a terror to the inhabitants who, on the other hand, get as much profit out of them as they can,” observed a French traveler in 1884 after visiting Deadwood,

Dakota Territory.¹³ Cow towns balanced tolerance of cowboy behavior against economic threat of exerting too much control.¹⁴ In the cow towns of the Old West, festive cowboys still meant prosperity.

Quick to sense prospects for prosperity were frontier newspaper editors. The “ink-slingers,”¹⁵ as they were fond of calling themselves, followed, or perhaps even preceded, settlement at nearly every tiny townsite throughout the western frontier. Like the cowboys editors usually were young, from the East, and with names and biographies mostly forgotten by history.¹⁶ Frontier editors generally found their voice in booming—that is, extolling the opportunities for health and wealth in the West, and particularly in their town, no matter how tiny. Nearly every town had a newspaper, perhaps several. In sparsely populated Dakota Territory, a contemporary report from the *Sturgis Weekly Record*, quoting from what it called a government pamphlet, in 1885 showed 275 newspapers.¹⁷ Settlers in Deadwood, now in South Dakota, could choose from four dailies, in what was then the largest city in the territory, with an 1880 census population of 3,677.¹⁸

Aim and Scope.

This research examines development of the American cowboy as a mythical figure from its source, and at its beginning, considering Dakota Territory cow town newspapers when the Old West was still new.

Deadwood marked the largest Dakota stop of the northern cattle town trail. It represented a particular kind of frontier newspaper, covering a particular kind of news: the cattle papers of Dakota Territory, and the cowboy. How does one define a cattle

paper? In the big cow towns like Abilene, it may have been a paper bankrolled and controlled by the big cattle concerns.¹⁹ In the smaller towns up and down the drives, it may have been a paper not controlled by, but still dependent on, the economy of the cattle drives. In all cases the towns chosen for this study were as close as possible to the Black Hills and Canadian cattle trails, as the north part was called.²⁰ The Dakota Territory's actual cattle centers were Belle Fourche in what is now South Dakota, and Medora in what is now North Dakota. While not as famous today as Kansas cow centers such as Abilene and Dodge City, these Dakota Territory towns were particularly important to the cattle industry during the long drive era. Belle Fourche, fifteen miles north of Deadwood, became the world's largest primary cattle shipping center by 1890, and was pasturing 700,000-800,000 head by 1884.²¹ Medora, some 200 miles north, site of North Dakota's only round-ups, became a nationally famous cow town thanks to two most distinctive cattlemen who ranched there: the French aristocrat Marquis de Morès, and eastern politician Theodore Roosevelt. The 1886 round-up there and in eastern Montana was one of the largest in the history of the entire cattle industry.²² Three of the region's newspapers form the basis of this study, as described below.

The Old West cowboy in myth and reality.

That the romantic life of the cowboy has become the central myth of American society is a story well known and nearly universally taken for granted.²³ By myth here we mean not an untruth per se, but an archetype: a historical figure repurposed to describe the world view of a nation or people. The cowboy of the Old West in myth is brave, heroic, courteous, stoic, enduring. He is the noble individual working alone on the trail,

always on the move. He is “the man of few words, the man who gets the girl and brings justice to the frontier.”²⁴ The cowboy in myth has grown to become “the essential American soul,”²⁵ the figure of countless movies and novels through the last century.

The cowboy of American myth does not square with the facts as experienced by those who knew and lived with them. Real drovers, as they were often called at the beginning of the long drive era, suffered a most disreputable reputation even beyond the cow towns that (more or less) welcomed them. The cowboys “had a reckless disregard of any restraint not imposed by himself,” wrote a contemporary from the East. They could be managed only by “the necessity for growth of law and order to protect people in the West.”²⁶ Men to detest, real cowboys were shiftless, unsavory, rough-hewn, unkempt; as one cowboy historian suggested, might be always on the move by virtue of their job, “but you wouldn’t want them sticking around along.”²⁷ “Throughout the East, the name ‘cowboy’ is looked upon as a synonym for lawlessness and cussedness,” editorialized the *Bismarck (D.T.) Tribune*, in questioning the name of the Medora newspaper, the *Bad Lands Cow Boy*.²⁸ He was “often held in disfavor by the general population as a rough, uncouth, and possibly lawless man.”²⁹ Disdain reached to the highest level: in 1881 President Chester Arthur in an address to Congress denounced as cowboys the “armed desperadoes” blocking peaceful settlement of Arizona Territory.³⁰

Beyond the epithets, the facts of actual cowboys are more scarce than one might imagine. Who were they? We don’t know very much about those 35,000. Asked to name one real cowboy and people today might think of Buffalo Bill, John Wayne, Charles M. Russell, Tom Mix, Roy Rogers—none of whom were remotely connected to real cattle drives.³¹ We do know they were young. Their lives were dangerous, and often lonely.

“To conduct a herd of wild cattle across such a wild country for hundreds of miles without loss from straying and stampeding is no light task,” wrote E. V. Smalley in Nimmo's 1885 report on the western cattle drive business.³² They seldom used guns except to kill a snake or a cow with a broken leg, and they were not good shots. They represented lower-level employees of large, absentee cattlemen, not much different from perhaps a shepherd.³³

Perhaps the mundane reality of life for mostly anonymous cowboys made it easier to use them as a framework on which to build a central American myth. Scholars have scoured the past to determine the source of the myth that by World War I became the dominant way Americans looked at the lives of the cowboy. Moskowitz focused on the thread emphasizing the cowboy as “knight of the prairie.”³⁴ She pointed out the cowboy in myth resembles the archetype of the medieval knight in English history. While actual knights were hardly romantic or chivalrous, their re-creation as myth “provided England with a central icon around which to establish identity as a nation.”³⁵ Similarly, she noted, the United States after the Civil War needed a unified image, and the cowboy fit the need.

The romantic myth of the “man of the West” has been traced to Daniel Boone in the late 1700s. Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, by declaring the end of the western frontier, served to set the scene, according to Moskowitz: “Once the frontier is an historical relic, it can become a space for historical reconstruction through nostalgia for its existence.”³⁶ But single story-teller given most credit for establishing the cowboy myth is Owen Wister, who published *The Virginian* in 1902. Wister was heavily influenced by Roosevelt; he gave the president credit in his foreword.³⁷

Roosevelt had fancied himself a “cowboy,” and was proud of it.³⁸ His experiences in Dakota Territory make this Old West region’s frontier press particularly worthy of detailed study, because Roosevelt’s speeches and writings also are considered to have had an enormous influence on establishing the cowboy myth, his symbol for “courage, honor, chivalry, individualism.”³⁹ On February 1, 1887, a dime novel by Prentiss Ingraham introduced “Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys,” who appeared in person that same year as a star among William (Buffalo Bill) Cody’s Wild West Show. William Levi Taylor became America’s first cowboy hero.⁴⁰ At this early stage such a thing seemed comparable to a television show today promoting a king of the street gangs.⁴¹ But appearing just a year later was Roosevelt’s *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail*, in which he rhapsodized of his experiences in Medora, and argued cowboys were “brave, hospitable, hardy, adventurous,” and cautioned, “it is utterly unfair to judge the whole class by what a few individuals do.”⁴²

The historiography of the cowboy as myth generally ignores contributions of writers before Roosevelt. In particular, it does not consider the power of the popular press. Roosevelt’s fame and writing ability focused strains of myth that had emerged in the media through a decade prior to its publication. Large national magazines such as *Harper’s New Monthly* and *Littell’s Living Age* by the 1880s were writing of “A picturesque, hardy lot of fellows, these wild ‘cow-boys.’” Taciturn, “a red face set in lines of iron...” but with a “kindly pair of blue eyes.... “Rough, but kindly meant words.”⁴³ One influential contemporary interpreter of the cattle industry, Joseph Nimmo Jr., U.S. Treasury chief of statistics who produced a book-length report on the industry, wrote in *Harpers* to defend cowboys. He said that cowboys, while originally reputed to

be ruffians, were improving, generally were “true and trusty men” who “have done much toward subduing a vast area to the arts of peace.”⁴⁴ Many serials also reprinted Roosevelt’s defenses of cowboys in the years before he published his 1888 paean.

Who interviewed Roosevelt about cowboys when the New York politician first decided to go west? Arthur T. Packard, publisher of the *Bad Lands Cow Boy*.

The cowboy portrayals by Wister, Cody and Roosevelt have been well-examined, but specifically how the occupation of the cowboy, a character without name or fame, moved from modest reality to romantic myth still eludes historians. Old West figures such as Jesse James represent the outlaw, Wyatt Earp the lawman, real people to give authenticity to the myth. Not the cowboy. Observed David Daly and Joel Persky in “The Western: Myth and Reality,” “The precise way, then, in which the cowboy has entered the realm of myth remains a mystery.”⁴⁵

This research attempts to consider a neglected possible contributor to that myth: the cattle town press. The researcher examines the press of Dakota Territory for two reasons. One, it was established toward the end of the long drive era, just as the myth was emerging. Two, it was the press closest to the experience of the Dakota Territory cattleman who became president and myth-maker: Theodore Roosevelt.

Cattle papers of Dakota Territory.

Unlike the eastern reporters who took quick tours to the West, cattle paper editors lived among the cowboys day by day, year by year. In cattle-driving they found their economic livelihood, just as the towns they served soared or suffered under the vicissitudes of cattle money. No other journalist knew cowboys like the cattle paper

journalist, except perhaps the writers of the specialized publications aimed directly at the stock growers, but these didn't write for a general audience. Cattle town papers in general and the papers studied here in particular influenced a wide swath of consumers far beyond their small towns. Evidence that cow town newspapers reached far afield is easy to find in the papers themselves. *Bad Lands Cow Boy* editor and publisher Arthur T. Packard regularly reprinted comments from eastern newspapers on his enterprise, including those from the *New York Sun* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press*.⁴⁶ "There are many copies of the *Record* go east direct from the office, besides those sent by private parties," wrote the editors of the *Sturgis Weekly Record*, Moody and Elliott.⁴⁷ Deadwood's *Daily Times*, published by Porter Warner, noted circulation was "very large" not only in the region, but throughout the country, and later boasted, "Scarcely a mail arrives without one to a dozen letters or postcards, asking for the paper or for information best supplied by the *Times*."⁴⁸ (Actual circulations were not published, except for the *Cow Boy*, which on page 4 of its August 7, 1884, issue declared its circulation to be 520, in a town of 261.) Under the suspicion, however, that these editors were merely self-booming, we can note that statements of more objective writers corroborate testimony of their widespread influence. Twice the *New York Times* lauded the *Cow Boy*, noting Medora had "a real live newspaper, called the *Bad Lands Cowboy* [sic], with Mr. G. [sic] Packard, formerly of Chicago, editor, and is destined before long to become one of the greatest points along the whole line of the Northern Pacific Railroad for the shipping of dressed beeves to Chicago."⁴⁹ Evidence seems ample that newspapers from the western frontier circulated widely back East through subscriptions and exchanges. Editors, western historians have agreed, "sent dozens of copies" back East, even overseas. Subscriptions were eagerly

sought back East, as the newspaper encouraged settlement of the town.⁵⁰ Publishers such as Packard also promoted to passing train travelers. To them he sold, according to one source, 700-800 a week.⁵¹ Some newspapers even employed traveling agents to hawk newspapers back East, offering commissions and prizes to productive peddlers.⁵² The cowboys themselves avidly searched out newspapers which they passed from hand to hand until they literally fell apart; it was “the great unifier” of the vast stretches of western plain tracked by the herders.⁵³

The three cattle papers chosen for study do not represent the total newspapers published in Lawrence County (Black Hills cattle region), but they do reflect the number published in Billings County (Medora cattle region), one. They are chosen by availability; of numerous publications apparently produced here during the years studied, many have not survived. These have: *The Black Hills Times* (daily) and *Weekly Times* (Sunday) of Deadwood, the *Sturgis Weekly Record* from that city, and the *Bad Lands Cow Boy* of Medora. No newspaper has survived from Belle Fourche itself, nor do any listings or references from the other papers indicate that one existed during the cattle drive era. The researcher examined every edition available during the time period studied for any references to cowboys. Based on words and characterizations historians today use to explain the cowboy archetype, these articles are categorized in two ways. Those articles categorized as negative tend not to depict cowboys using themes of myth. Those articles categorized as positive tend to mythologize cowboys using these themes.

All issues examined begin with Number One, the earliest being the April 7, 1877, *Times* of Deadwood. The cattle drive era reached Dakota Territory with settlement of this last frontier (northern Dakota Territory was the last state to establish a newspaper, in

1864⁵⁴), but at this time the era was just reaching its peak of power and influence in the West.

Ending the period is 1886. In long drive history, 1886-87 marked a pivotal year between reality and myth. The reality was nearly at an end: a harsh winter that year killed a majority of the cattle grazing most of the overstocked northern plains, wiping out fortunes of many opportunist cattlemen, including Morès and Roosevelt.⁵⁵ It was a severe blow to an already weakened industry, hampered not only lower beef prices, fencing and settlement on the old routes, but by state laws barring Texas cattle, possibly carrying Texas Fever, from trailing north. The closing of Kansas to cattle drives, perhaps more than any other single reason, brought an end to the long drive era.⁵⁶ Contemporary writers in 1885 saw it coming, warning of overstocking⁵⁷ and noting, “they [cowboys] are passing away. Farms will soon cover the regions where their cattle wander at will, and they and all pertaining to them will become things of the past.”⁵⁸ In 1887 Ingraham introduced Buck Taylor, Cody invented his show, and a few months later, Roosevelt published his book.

Most cow town newspapers either reinvented themselves to serve a town of farmers, miners, ranchers or merchants, or they joined the big boot hill of the frontier press. Of the three cow town newspapers examined here, one did not live past the end of the long drive era. The *Bad Lands Cow Boy* published its last surviving edition December 23, 1886; on January 12, 1887, a fire destroyed the office.⁵⁹ In any case, by 1889, Medora had become nearly a ghost town.⁶⁰ The *Daily Times* of Deadwood fared better, as it was the principal daily in a city built originally on mining, not cattle. The *Sturgis Weekly Record*, too, survived the end of “king cattle.” The *Bad Lands Cow Boy* was published by

A. T. Packard. The *Daily Times* was published by Porter Warner. The *Sturgis Weekly Record* was published by C. C. Moody.

Unlike newspapers that followed “king cattle,” Warner’s daily initially followed gold in the Hills. In early issues it squarely declared itself to be a spokesman of a mining town.⁶¹ No story on cattle or cowboys reached its pages during the first year of its existence. However, as the long drives didn’t reach Dakota Territory until the end of the 1870s, no newspaper would have covered the issue from the local perspective. First cattle-related story appeared January 20, 1880, a note observing “The superiority of this county as a stock growing region has been abundantly demonstrated during the present winter.”⁶² From then on the importance of Belle Fourche’s cattle industry become more and more important to Deadwood’s economic livelihood.⁶³ The *Times* acknowledged this implicitly in its ever-increasing articles on the industry, and explicitly in its tracking of the industry. By 1880, the newspaper noted, the cattle industry had been established for “the past year or two,” and locally was so profitable that, for example, a \$10,400 investment could return \$25,800.⁶⁴

Hype of cattle industry profitability in Dakota was echoed by the other cow town newspapers studied here. By 1883, recorded the *Sturgis Weekly Record*, 700,000-800,000 head were in the area, and the paper predicted that in two years the Black Hills area “will have more live stock wandering over its ranges than are contained in any state or territory in the Union.”⁶⁵ The *Bad Lands Cow Boy* declared its intention “to preach King Cattle to all men,”⁶⁶ and did not waver on that promise until the boom turn to bust and the *Cow Boy* office turned to ashes. In fact, this paper, as most unabashedly dedicated to the cattle industry in boom town Medora, published hardly a story not connected to cattle in some

way. The *Record* during these years appealed to more general interest: in 1883 (Issue One was published at the end of July), it published two articles on the cattle industry; in 1884 it published none, but in 1885, it published ten. The *Times*, after starting slowly, publishing no articles covering cattlemen before 1880, and published eleven in that year; in 1881, it published 26; in 1882, none; in 1883, two; in 1884, 18; in 1885, 51; in 1886, 4. (These numbers reflect general cattle industry articles, not articles on a specific cowboy theme.)

Cowboys in the Cow Town Papers.

The *Times* published its first article relating to the cowboy on May 26, 1881, one of three that year. Its story-telling narrative recounts the life of the cowboy, an entire column of charming anecdotes: “In the midst of a mountain storm, in view of tarantulas, rattlesnakes and centipedes for bedfellows, he closes his eyes and dreams of a heaven of unlimited plug tobacco and unstinted sleep....” And what’s best for the cowboy, “if you can only sing a little, you can do the work all the quicker.”⁶⁷ This narrative supports the cowboy myth, the simple and honest man, noble and stoic. But this was not a harbinger of cowboys to come as depicted in the *Times*. When for a second time the columns open to a cowboy theme, drovers had become the bad guys. “They are probably the most reckless gang of desperadoes ever banded together,” reported the *Times* in an article recounting a band of seventy cowboys out for revenge in Mexico. Later that fall, a third article found cowboys closer to Deadwood depicted negatively, as the newspaper recounted a “shooting affray” between cowboys Combs and Wilson, who settled a quarrel near Spearfish with guns.⁶⁸

Cowboys in the *Times* did not become a topic often during the next two years, reaching the newspaper's columns twice in 1882, and four times in 1883. Of these six articles, none supported the cowboy myth. On June 14, 1882, they were "thugs"; the next day they were "gangs"; in 1883 they were "drunken cowboys, or a "bad cowboy," or again, "drunken cowboys."

But the dates are significant; this was before the Deadwood paper had awakened to the potential of the cattle trailing business in southern Dakota Territory. Before 1884 the newspaper had published few articles at all about the cattle-trailing industry. But that year it published eighteen articles on the industry, and seven on cowboys. Of these seven, four, or 57%, treated cowboys favorably.

"The greatly reviled, and often unjustly so, cowboy, receives kind consideration from an exchange in a manner that meets the approbation of all familiar with that peculiar and interesting class of individuals," an editor's note in an 1884 edition began. The article continued to describe the cowboys' generosity, his tough but honest life. Significantly, it used the word "knight" to describe him: "Of course, the knight of the lariat, when under the influence of liquor, is noisy. Aside from this he is a harmless creature."⁶⁹ Later that summer cowboys were credited with capturing horse thieves, and/or generally leading an honest, and solitary, life.⁷⁰ This description strongly supports Moskowitz's view that the cowboy myth was built on the medieval English myth of the knight. We also see in this passage an indication that the original view of the cowboy as a drunken ruffian may have a good side. Tristram P. Coffin observed that in the cowboy myth, a tough man may make mischief, but that is to be forgiven: "He is expected to be lawless and buccaneering if he is to be worth his salt. No excuse has to be made for his desire to raise hell."⁷¹

Stories of cowboys in the *Times* in 1885 jumped to sixteen, with forty-five reports on the industry generally. It might be concluded that the cowboy image in the *Times* was showing a pattern favoring the myth after 1884. This was not the case. In 1885, 81% of cowboy articles in that newspaper were negative. Cowboys were blamed for “the Sand Creek shooting” near Deadwood: three of them “decided it would be ‘lots of fun’ to shoot out the lights, etc.” in Jim Davis’ saloon in Spearfish. Jim demurred with a Winchester, and the cowboys themselves ended up shot. “The general verdict is, ‘served them right!’”⁷² Other reports covered cowboy riots, cowboy drunks, cowboy troublemakers, cowboy fights, or cowboy stupidity.⁷³

The year 1885 marked the high point of *Times* articles on the cowboy as well as the cattleman theme. In 1886 seven articles addressed the cowboy, and only four the cattle business. Of the cowboy stories, 71% were similarly negative. One exception to this was a yarn about a “cowboy pianist” under a New York dateline. “He astounded us. In facility, force, brilliance and rapidity of execution, I confess that he amazed me.” The story explained that an old Chickering brand piano belonging to the cowboy’s father was being used as an ironing board. The prodigal cowboy decided to give the piano a try after an injury, explained by repeating the theme of cowboys as drunkards: “You know what the boys are out there. We had a ride of sixteen miles, and we stopped half way and got drunk.”⁷⁴

While the *Times* did not show a pattern toward cowboy myth-making, it did include articles reflecting such themes. The *Sturgis Weekly Record* did not. Of five reports on the cowboy theme, none emphasized mythically positive qualities. Apparently locally written but without byline, one entire column seemed to actually refute a myth

already growing by this date. “So much amusing talk is being made recently about the blood-bedraggled cow-boy of the wild West that I rise as one man to say a few things....” The cowboy is just another human being, the author declared, despite that “I hate to sit down on a beautiful romance and squash the heart out of a romantic dream. He generally is a youth who thinks he will not earn his twenty-five dollars per month if he does not yell and whoop and shoot and scare little girls....” but that cowboys end up hurting themselves and others because “they are no more familiar with the horse than with Smith & Wesson.” The writer concluded, “All cow-boys are not sanguinary, but out of twenty you will find one who is brave when he has his revolvers with him....”⁷⁵

The *Bad Lands Cow Boy* stood in distinct contrast to this material. Packard clearly decided to thrust his pen directly against the negative image. It began with the title of the newspaper. In his second issue, Packard stated his goal:

First, that cow boys are, as a rule, one of the most peaceful and law-abiding classes of citizens that we have....The term “cow boy” has been a reproach long enough. Every other paper in the land has joined hands to heap contumely on the devoted head of the cow boy. We will stand singly and alone and uphold a name which we know represented a good cause.⁷⁶

Packard’s declared mission (next to making money) threads throughout the entire three-year run of this weekly. Sometimes Packard relied on negative reports from eastern newspapers as a foil, calling, for example, one such report in the *Minneapolis Evening Journal* “from beginning to end a lie.... If a man knows anything of a class called cow boys he cannot help but know that as a class they are honest, industrious and

fearless...they are generous, hospital [sic] and extravagant to a fault, and abhor a dishonorable action....⁷⁷

Many more articles and poems defending the cowboy were borrowed from other sources. Included were three interviews with Roosevelt. The future president is quoted as defending cowboys: "Cow boys are a very much maligned order of human beings. I have always found them a very hospitable, generous sort of men with a certain rude chivalry about them." The word "chivalry" reflects the theme of noble knight, presented explicitly in a poem ending, "An errant knight without a code?—The Cowboy."⁷⁸

Numerous jokes also extolled bluff cowboy virtue. A cowboy enters a train car where a snoring man is annoying passengers. "The cow boy stepped up, said, 'Say, stranger, stop that 'ar snort or you'll get fired.' The cow boy was not large but he was full of guns and there was business in his eye. The big man said nothing but lay still, and his sleep, if he slept, was quiet as the slumber of infancy."⁷⁹

During the *Cow Boy's* run sixty-nine articles specifically addressed the cowboy theme. Of these, 10% could be considered negative, though usually Packard included in a report of troublemaking cowboys a disclaimer, such as "Four-fifths of the reckless shooting done in the West is the work of some sap-headed tender-foot who wants to pose as a bad man."⁸⁰ Packard, as did unsigned editorials in the *Times*, did rail periodically against "the senseless custom of 'packing a gun'" in town."⁸¹ Cowboy themes addressed by Packard included misguided "bad" cowboys and their handiwork (19%); kindly ridicule of cowboys, usually "tenderfoots" (10%); great life of cowboys in the beauty of the West (8%); romance of the roundup (4%); freedom of the cowboy (3%); cowboys and Indians (6%) and "dudes" trying to pose as cowboys (10%). Largest, however, were

topics pertaining to the positive character and morality of cowboys as stoic, but law-abiding, humble, courageous, noble heroes. “Honest... generous...fearless... hardship... adventure... perfect type of manhood... abhors a dishonorable action... finest horsemen... worships his horse....”⁸²

The adjectives from this cattle paper nearly mirror those of cowboy myth-maker Roosevelt, in interviews published from coast to coast. “Hospitable, generous sort of men with a certain rude chivalry....” “Simple, unconscious manhood...the jealousy of personal valor.... “Hospitable, hardy, adventurous....simple and generous....”⁸³ Roosevelt and Packard often socialized often in Medora, the future president regularly visiting Packard’s office to avoid the rowdy saloon. It is hard to say who influenced whom.

Conclusion.

Dakota’s cattle town newspapers, well-read back East, reflected independence and personal flair. They aimed at profit over idealism, though they were not universally positive about the prospects of the cattle industry. Concerning depiction of the cowboy as man or myth, the *Cow Boy* differed from the primarily negative *Times* and *Record*. But the stories of the cowboy need to be considered as more than just portrayals in a positive or negative light. Also worth considering are the style and tone. If we examine these newspaper articles regarding cowboys not for specific content but for writing style, similarities become more apparent. News of the cattle industry and cattle drives is presented factually, covering meetings, laws, weather, politics, numbers of cattle and economic impact. Articles about cowboys tell stories, often in narrative form. The cowboy stories depict narrations of saloon fights and duels, of dramatic battles with

desperadoes and lawmen, of antics with trains and conductors, of long days in a saddle, of tough men being tender and not, of wide open skies, horses, leather—and even song. But they seldom deal in facts. They resemble in writing style the fairy-tale-like narratives that formed during this period such an attractive feature of many American newspapers, according to historian Paulette D. Kilmer: “Like a fairy tale, such a story works through symbolism.”⁸⁴ In fact, the only article which seemed to attempt a truly factual report of cowboy life was the front-page piece published by the *Record* described above. A myth begins as a story, and the cowboy story stood in contrast to the news styles in the newspapers examined.

As the days of the cattle drives clearly were coming to an end, Roosevelt and others predicted, “when the cow boy disappears, one of the best and healthiest phases of western life with disappear with him.”⁸⁵ But while the long drive-era cowboy of fact did disappear, the Old West cowboy of story-tellers grew to replace him. Cowboy stories by then had been well covered in the cowboy’s own newspapers, shoot-’em-up narratives that could already were turning into legend. The cow town newspapers examined here showed no consensus regarding the character of the real cowboy. But they certainly did contribute to the building of a mythical one.

Note: An earlier version of this article was published online in Media History

Monographs, Vol. 3, No. 1, <http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu/mediahistory/mhmjour3-1.htm>

¹ Norbert R. Mahnken, “Ogallala—Nebraska’s Cowboy Capital.” *Nebraska History* 28 (1947), 91. This route through Dodge City had supplanted the older Chisholm Trail route through Abilene by the time Dakota Territory became a big cattle industry player.

² Mahnken., 85; Floyd Benjamin Streeter, *Prairie Trails and Cow Towns* (Boston: Chapman & Grimes, 1936), 64; David G. McComb, *Texas. A Modern History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 87.

³ Precisely 5, 201, 232, according to a contemporary report: Joseph Nimmo, Jr., Chief of the Bureau of Statistics, Treasury Department, *Report in Regard to the Range and Ranch Cattle Business of the United*

States (Washington, DC: Treasury Department, 1885), 28; Everett Dick, *Vanguards of the Frontier. A Social History of the Northern Plains and Rocky Mountains from the Fur Traders to the Sod Busters* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1941), 470. Ten million according to David Nevin, *The Texans* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1975), 180.

⁴ G. Pomeroy Keese, "Beef From the Range to the Shambles." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 69 (1884), 292.

⁵ "Cattle Ranges. A letter from Gen. Brisbin," excerpt from *Omaha Bee*, the *Black Hills Times*, 29 November 1885, 4 (hereafter referred to as the *Times*).

⁶ *Times*, 20 January 1886, 1. (If newspaper articles had no title, only the date and page number are given in footnotes.) David Galenson, "Origins of the Long Drive," *Journal of the West* 14 (1975), 3; "Paying Cattle Ranches. A Thriving Industry in the Northwest," *The New York Times*, 21 September, 1884, 4.

⁷ David Daly and Joel Persky, "The Western: Myth and Reality." *Journal of the West* 29 (1990), 23.

⁸ Jimmy M. Skaggs, *The Cattle-Trailing Industry. Between Supply and Demand 1866-1890* (Lawrence, Manhattan, Wichita: The University Press of Kansas, 1973), 5. Floyd Benjamin Streeter, *Prairie Trails and Cow Towns* (Boston: Chapman & Grimes, 1936), 63.

⁹ Keese, 295.

¹⁰ Skaggs, 88.

¹¹ Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 25.

¹² Dick, *Vanguards of the Frontier*, 493.

¹³ Edmond Baron de Mandat-Grancey, William Conn, translator, Forward by Howard Lamar, 1887 London Edition, *Cow-Boys and Colonels* (Reprint, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 15.

¹⁴ Skaggs, 91.

¹⁵ *Times*, passim; other favored descriptions included "quill-shovers" and "scribes."

¹⁶ Robert F. Karolevitz, *Newspapering in the Old West. A Pictorial History of Journalism and Printing on the Frontier* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1965), 12; Joseph Nimmo, Jr., "The American Cow-boy," *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* 73 (1886): 883. Everett, *Vanguards*, 491-3. D. Jerome Tweton, lecture commemorating the North Dakota Cowboy Hall of Fame, North Dakota State University, Fargo, 14 January 1998.

¹⁷ *Sturgis Weekly Record*, 1 March 1885, 2.

¹⁸ William H. Lyon, "The Significance of Newspapers on the American Frontier," *Journal of the West* 19 (April 1980): 3; *Times*, 16 July 1880, 2; 8 October 1880, 2. Cloud's work disputed the belief that territorial newspapers were ubiquitous, noting that of 165 counties in eight 1880 frontier territories, including Dakota, only 76 had newspapers. Barbara Cloud, "Establishing the Frontier Newspaper: a Study of Eight Western Territories," *Journalism Quarterly* 61 (Winter 1984): 807. However, in this southwestern Dakota area, at least twelve were published between 1876-1890. *Times*, 8 October 1880, 2; online search of South Dakota archives. The *Times* alluded to many more, now apparently lost.

¹⁹ Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (New York: Knopf, 1971), 149.

²⁰ Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 250.

²¹ Schell., 244, 250.

²² William H. Forbis, *The Cowboys* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973), 119; "Hunting Trips of a Ranchman." *Atlantic Monthly* 56 (July-December 1885): 563-565; William T. Dantz, "Theodore Roosevelt—Cowboy and Ranchman. A Cowboy's Reminiscences of the President's Cowboy Experiences as a Ranchman in the Bad Lands of North Dakota" *Harper's Weekly* 48 (1904): 1212-1215; A. T. Packard, "Roosevelt's Ranching Days. The Outdoor Training of a President as a Man Among Men," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 4 March 1905, 13-14; "Paying Cattle Ranches. A Thriving Industry in the Northwest," *The New York Times*, 21 September 1884, 4; "Dressed Beef in the West. The Business Enterprise of the Marquis de Morès," *The New York Times*, 25 February 1884, 8. These articles form a small sample of numerous articles both in the United States and in Europe on the western activities of Roosevelt and Morès. A neighboring cattleman said by the time a newspaper appeared in Medora the town was already nationally famous. Hermann Hagedorn, *Roosevelt on the Bad Lands* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930), 77.

²³ William W. Savage, ed., *Cowboy Life. Reconstructing an American Myth* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 3; Athearn, 23; Don D. Walker, *Clio's Cowboys. Studies in the Historiography of the Cattle Trade* (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press), 1891, 76. While the definition

of “myth” is debated among western historians, what is agreed upon is that if there is one figure that most exemplifies the concept, it is the West and its central hero, the cowboy. Daly and Persky, 7, 10.

²⁴ Benjamin Percy, “‘The Virginian’ Teaches the Merit of a Man,” NPR books, September 17, 2007. Available from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14478995>. Internet.

²⁵ Jennifer Moskowitz, “The Cultural Myth of the Cowboy, or, How the West Was Won,” *Americana. The Journal of American Popular Culture 1900 to Present* 5, no. 1, (2006), no page number; Available from http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2006/moskowitz.htm. Internet.

²⁶ Keese, 292.

²⁷ Russell Martin, *Cowboy. The Enduring Myth of the Wild West* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, Publishers, 1983), 111.

²⁸ Ray H. Mattison, “Ranching in the Dakota Badlands. A Study of Roosevelt’s Contemporaries,” *North Dakota History* 19 (1952): 114.

²⁹ Peter Watts, *A Dictionary of the Old West 1870-1900* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 100.

³⁰ Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 305.

³¹ Martin, 35.

³² Eugene V. Smalley, in Nimmo, *Report in Regard to the Range and Ranch Cattle Business in the United States*, Appendix One, 76.

³³ Martin, 40.

³⁴ Joe B. Frantz, “Cowboy Philosophy. A Cold Spoor,” in *The Frontier Reexamined*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 170.

³⁵ Moskowitz, no page number.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Owen Wister, *The Virginian. A Horseman of the Plains* (University of Virginia American Studies program, hypertext version, 2000). Available at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wister/header.html>. Internet.

³⁸ Paul O’Neil, *The Old West. The End and the Myth* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1979), 122.

³⁹ Joe B. Frantz, 170; Savage, 6.

⁴⁰ Russell, 305, 389; Savage, 111.

⁴¹ Martin, 111; Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation. The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 87.

⁴² Theodore Roosevelt, *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, reprint, originally published in 1888), 100.

⁴³ Rufus Fairchild, “A Day’s ‘Drive’ with Montana Cow-Boys.” *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* 71 (1885), 190; Arthur H. Paterson, “Camp Life on the Plains,” excerpt from *Macmillan’s Magazine in Littell’s Living Age* 160 (1884): 361-2.

⁴⁴ Joseph Nimmo Jr., *Harpers*, 881. This article flattering the cowboy was reprinted by the *Bad Lands Cow Boy* on 18 November 1886, 1.

⁴⁵ Daly and Persky, 25.

⁴⁶ Editorial, *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, 20 March 1884, 1.

⁴⁷ Editorial response to letter to the editor, *Sturgis Weekly Record*, 25 January 1884, 2.

⁴⁸ Editorials, *Times*, 19 October 1884, 1; 24 November 1885, 2.

⁴⁹ “Paying Cattle Ranches. A Thriving Industry in the Northwest,” *The New York Times*, 21 September 1884, 4. Also mentioned 25 February 1884, 8.

⁵⁰ Karolevitz, 118; Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier 1854-1890* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1937, 1954, 1979), 418-9; Paul C. Schmidt, “The Press in North Dakota,” *North Dakota History* 31 (1964): 219; George S. Hage, *Newspapers in the Minnesota Frontier 1849-1860* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1967), 9; Hagedorn, 76.

⁵¹ Barry Brissman, “The *Bad Lands Cow Boy*: Journalism on the Dakota Frontier” (Master’s thesis, University of Iowa, 1981), 84-85. Brissman had access to unpublished material by Hermann Hagedorn, who in 1921 interviewed Roosevelt’s ranch partners as well as Packard about the president’s Dakota years. While many frontier newspapers clearly circulated on passing trains, this figure of newspapers sold each week seems high.

⁵² Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier*, 432.

⁵³ Dick, *Vanguards*, 478; William H. Lyon, “The Significance of Newspapers on the American Frontier,” *Journal of the West* 19 (1980): 5, footnote.

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- ⁵⁴ Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Early Printing in Wyoming and the Black Hills* (Hattiesburg, MS: The Book Farm, 1943), 9.
- ⁵⁵ Walker, 29; James McClellan Hamilton, *History of Montana. From Wilderness to Statehood* (Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort, Pub., 1970), 394; "Off to India With Tigers. The Marquis de Morès Tired of America," *The New York Times*, 19 December 1887, 1.
- ⁵⁶ Skaggs, 97, 103; Daly and Persky, 24.
- ⁵⁷ Frank Wilkeson, "Cattle-Raising on the Plains," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 72 (April 1886): 789, 793.
- ⁵⁸ Book review of Theodore Roosevelt's *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*. *The Atlantic Monthly* 56 (1885): 565.
- ⁵⁹ *The Dickinson* (Dakota Territory) *Press*, 5 January 1887, 4. Dickinson was closest Dakota rival to Medora during the territory's cattle days.
- ⁶⁰ Excerpted from *Northwest Magazine*, the *Dickinson Press*, 12 January 1889, 3.
- ⁶¹ *Times*, 24 May 1877, 2; 16 August 1879-1 January 1880 editions are lost.
- ⁶² *Times*, 4.
- ⁶³ Parker, 78.
- ⁶⁴ *Times*, 14 February 1880, 2.
- ⁶⁵ Editorial, *Record*, 3 August 1883, 2; "Cattlemen of Black Hills," 12 October 1883, 1.
- ⁶⁶ *Cow Boy*, 7 February 1884, 1.
- ⁶⁷ *Times*, "A Cowboy's Life," 26 May 1881, 2.
- ⁶⁸ *Times*, "The Cowboys on the War Trail," 22 June 1881, 1; "Shooting Affair," 5 October 1881.
- ⁶⁹ *Times*, "The Cowboy," 6 July 1884, 2.
- ⁷⁰ *Times*, "Cowboys Capture Horsethieves," [sic] 10 August 1884, 2; "Dakota Beeves," 21 October 1884, 1.
- ⁷¹ Tristram P. Coffin, "The Cowboy and Mythology," *Western Folklore*, 12, no. 4 (1953), 292.
- ⁷² *Times*, "The Sand Creek Shooting," 12 January 1885, 3.
- ⁷³ *Times*, 1885, passim.
- ⁷⁴ *Times*, "A Cowboy Pianist," 21 March 1886, 3.
- ⁷⁵ *Weekly Record*, "The Cow-boy," 4 January 1884, 1.
- ⁷⁶ *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, 14 February 1884, 1.
- ⁷⁷ *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, 10 June 1884, 1.
- ⁷⁸ *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, 22 June 1885, 1; credit to New Mexico *Stockgrower*, *Cow Boy*, 18 December 1884, 1.
- ⁷⁹ *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, 30 October 1884, 1.
- ⁸⁰ *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, 26 March 1885, 1.
- ⁸¹ *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, 30 July 1885, 4.
- ⁸² *Bad Lands Cow Boy*, passim.
- ⁸³ "Likes Dakota. Hon. Theodore Roosevelt Talks to a Reporter About Dakota and Her Warm Hearted People." *Fargo* (D.T.) *Daily Argus*, 20 January 1885, 3; Dantz, 1212; Roosevelt, 9-10, 100.
- ⁸⁴ Paulette D. Kilmer, *The Fear of Sinking. The American Success Formula in the Gilded Age* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 1.
- ⁸⁵ "Roosevelt on Cow Boys and Indians," *Times*, 22 January 1886, 2.