

The Cowboy



Past and Present



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First, the cowpoke

At Oklahoma State University (OSU) our official mascot of the cowboys or cowgirls, depending on the gender playing the sport, but when referring to both genders simultaneously we call ourselves cowpokes, as if they all mean the same thing. This was not always the case.

A “cowboy”

Agriculture has always faced a logistics problem. Food is perishable and grown in one place but consumed in another. Before the Industrial Revolution, to sell grain one had to use expensive wagon and water transportation. Selling livestock was easier though, as the animals could walk themselves.

For most of human history livestock would be forced to walk to the place of their slaughter, and the people who “drove” them there in herds were called “drovers”. Often the animals were driven on the same roads used by travelers and wagons, but some of the roads were used more for livestock than people. Referred to as “drover roads”, some still exist in Wales and can be traced by two millennia.

These were far cries from the cattle drives we associated with American cowboys of the late 1800s. Most of the drovers walked, and the animals were more tame than the longhorns cowboys would push up the Chisholm Trail. They were assisted more by dogs than by horses. Droving was not just about cattle. Sheep, pigs, and even fowl would be driven many miles over many days. In the 1700s cattle were routinely driven from Wales to England. In the 1800s up to 150,000 pigs would be driven from Tennessee, across the Appalachian mountains, to South Carolina (parts of those old drover roads can still be seen). In the 1500s geese and turkeys in their thousands were driven in England, and had to

progress slowly for the birds’ health, taking over three months to cover a hundred miles. Birds are not designed for walking, and so their feet had to be protected. The turkeys wore boots made in leather and geese, who were harder to shod, had their feet dipped in tar and then covered in sand.

There are similarities between the drover and the cowboy. Both spent nights sleeping under the stars, and

both had to make sure the animals were driven at the proper pace so they had time to eat along the way but also make reasonable progress. Both were tough men who had to deal with farmers along the way who did not welcome their presence. They made little money, and celebrated so heartily at reaching their destination they often left with little in their pocket.

There are two main distinctions between the drover and the cowboy, though. Drovers handled tame animals while the longhorns driven up the Chisholm trail were feral. Drovers most crossed lands of their own people, whereas cowboys were often invading Indian territory.

The rehearsal

Throughout the Middle Ages the Iberian Peninsular (modern-day Portugal and Spain) was host to two competing religions: Islam in the south and Christianity in the north. Before Mohammad’s revelations in the sixth century the peninsular was mostly all Christian, but Islam began with a burst and the southern region was quickly conquered by Muslims. From then until 1492, Christians steadily “reconquered” the peninsular, starting in the north and working their way down to the southernmost tip. Referred to as the *Reconquista*, it ended in the region we now call Andalusia, and served as a dress rehearsal for the taming of the wild west of the New World.

Andalusia is similar to the American west in three ways. First, it is an arid, tough territory. Second, the conquering of Andalusia mimics the American west in that it was land first used by other peoples who did not retreat silently. Third, the new settlers were keen on cattle, attempting to establish large cattle ranches—not farms—and so it is here where the cowboy was born.

Long before the *Reconquista* was complete unique breeds of cattle emerged in Andalusia. All cattle evolved from the now extinct auroch, who could be found throughout Europe, Asia, and North Africa. From the auroch were domesticated two sub-species of modern-day cattle (1) the *Bos indicus*, who have a hump and (2) *Bos taurus*, who lack a hump.

The cattle indigenous to Andalusia were of the *Bos taurus* genetics. Referred to as *Bos taurus ibericus*, it was



black, tough, strong, and mean. It could thrive in dry, hot regions and had no trouble protecting itself. It would soon become Spanish fighting bulls, a breed called *ganado bravo*. This breed was crossed with lighter color breeds from the northern, more humid area of the peninsula, a more gentle cow that was used for both milking and meat. Their progeny were also tough, but not as aggressive, and their coat contained a kaleidoscope of colors. They would be named *berrenda* cattle (*berrenda* means “spotted coat” in Spanish), and come in either black or red colors, in addition to white.

Berrenda had the advantage that they were easily trained. They can be taught to pull plows and wagons, and are often used as a guide for Andalusian fighting bulls. It is difficult to make a fighting bull go where you want, but they will follow other cattle readily).

Andalusia is dry and so provides little fodder for cattle. Cattle in this area would need to roam over large areas to find enough food, too large of an area to be fenced in. They had to be able to protect themselves and their young from wild predators, and find their own water sources. These Spanish cattle with varying degrees of *ganado bravo*, *berrenda*, and other breed genetics suited this land well. Their meat was stringy and tough, so it would be made into recipes like *Ropa Vieja*, and their tough hides were particularly valuable. Meat was a staple food of the Spaniards, at a time when most other Europeans relied mostly on cereals for their nutrition.

For most of their lives the Spanish cattle took care of themselves over large areas, and were then gathered periodically for branding and driven somewhere to be harvested. This was serious ranching before Columbus ever thought about crossing the Atlantic. It was arguably the first ranching culture to develop, and was distinctly Spanish, as little of their culture or cattle genetics came from the Moors or North Africa. These were the first real cowboys, called *vaqueros*, who worked on the back of a horse, and whose main tool was an Andalusian lance called a *garrochas*.

These cattle first found their way to the Canary Islands, and then in the New World aboard Columbus’ second landing in 1493. They flourished, reproducing quickly, and then taken by the Mexican mainland by Hernán Cortés in 1519, where they continued to flourish. Some cattle escaped or were deliberately set loose to reproduce, to be rounded up later like their ancestors who remained in Andalusia.

Before the arrival of Europeans there were a few

domesticated animals in the New World, like chickens, guinea pigs, ducks, turkeys, and dogs, but they were not used nearly as intensively as Europeans used their livestock. Native Americans relied mostly on wild game for meat, and the only animal used for work was the dog, who served mostly as an alarm.

The first cattle in the New World arrived in 1000 AD in the Viking settlement of Newfoundland, but that settlement was soon abandoned. It was Christopher Columbus’ second voyage in 1493 that brought cattle permanently. His first voyage was about discovery; the second was about settlement. On board were a variety of livestock to seed this new civilization, including Spanish cattle and sheep. They were set loose on the island of Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti and Dominican Republic) and they thrived, finding ample food and no predators.

Other Spanish followed, moving these cattle to mainland Mexico, and later up into Texas and New Mexico. When we think of some of the first Europeans we often imagine the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock in 1620, but Europeans first traveled the U.S. southwest nearly a century prior, and the Spanish established the first capital of New Mexico in 1598. Spanish cattle were thriving in modern-day U.S. long before any of those Pilgrims were even born!

As centuries passed, the Spanish cattle changed little but the conquerers of the New World did. First Spain dominated Mexico and the southwest. Then Mexico established independence from Spain at the same time the descendants of the Pilgrims and other non-Spanish immigrants moved westward. America achieved Manifest Destiny in 1848 and were the new rulers, only find itself in a Civil War in 1865. Here is where our story of the American cowboy really begins.

Waterloo of sixty-six

The Spanish cattle came to dominate Texas, but more for their tallow (rendered beef fat) and hides than their meat, which was lean and tough. Some of the cattle were managed like regular domesticated animals, while others were feral and were hunted in the wild. One memoir tells of a Texas slaughterhouse that killed around 200 Spanish cattle each day, keeping only the hide and fat and feeding the meat to hogs. Today we refer to them as Texas Longhorn cattle, and though we will use the term “longhorns” that name is a twentieth century invention.

During the U.S. Civil War trade between regions was interrupted, and without a market for hides, meat, and tallow in the northern or international markets, the

value of longhorns fell and so they were slaughtered in smaller numbers. Each year the war took more American lives in led to greater longhorn numbers on the Texas prairie. At the same time, northerners were developing an increasing taste for beef over pork (formerly their meat of choice). So when the war ended and trade resumed, there were thousands of longhorn cattle in Texas free for the taking and high beef prices up north. The challenge was transporting them from here to there, and in meeting this challenge the cowboy was invented.

Their key to getting cattle north was to drive them from Texas to the nearest railroad depot where there were few settlers. The need for a close railroad is due to the fact that it is far cheaper to ship cattle by rail than on their own hoof. Avoiding settlers was either required by law or desired to avoid high fees or hostilities. It is obvious that settlers with a newly planted field of corn didn't

want a herd of longhorns trampling over it, but the main reason settlers didn't want longhorns anywhere in sight is Texas Fever.

Texas Fever is a cattle disease caused by a parasitic protozoan *Rhipicephalus annulatus*, a name formed by the Greek word *rhipis* meaning "fan", the Greek word *kephale* meaning "head", and the Latin word for "ringed" which is *annulatus*. As one can guess from the name, the tick's head has a fan-like appearance, due to small extensions on both sides of its head, and we shall thus call it "Fan Head." After the Fan Head has had its fill of blood from cattle, it looks for a mate on the same animal. After mating the male keeps looking for other mates on the animal while the female drops to the ground to lay eggs. In the warm climate of southern Texas the tick can reproduce continually, but the Fan Head cannot survive in cold temperatures, so the cattle can carry the Fan Head can carry the tick north with them into Oklahoma and Kansas, but they will not survive the winter.

Within the body of the Fan Head the protozoan *Babesia*

Bigemina can usually be found, and when they feed on their host they inject their spores into the animal's bloodstream. These spores enter red blood cells, and multiply in such high numbers that they rupture the blood cells. Those large number of spores then look for other blood cells to invade and reproduce, causing more red blood cells to rupture. Serious internal bleeding then occurs, causing fever, anemia, and enlargement of the spleen and liver. It will kill 9 out of 10 animals it infects.

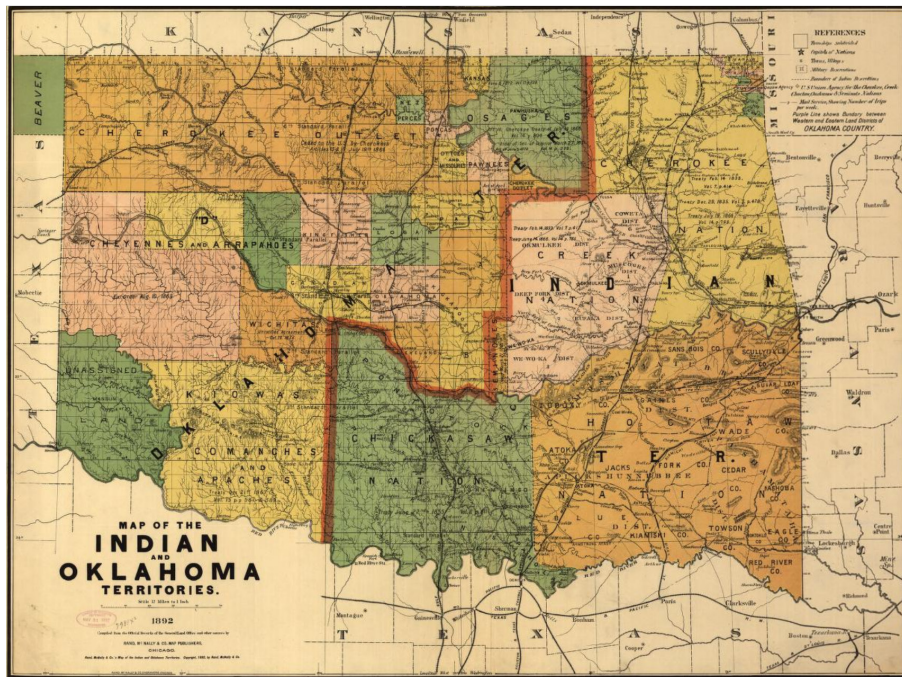
The longhorn was obviously immune to cattle fever,

or it wouldn't have been able to survive for centuries in Texas. One reason is that longhorn calves born would be immediately invaded by ticks and the protozoan they carried. But the calf also immediately began nursing from its mother, and in the first few days the mother's milk contains colostrum, which is packed not only with nutrients but antibodies.

These antibodies encountered the protozoan, then, doing what antibodies do, developed a system whereby its white blood cells could kill it. This bestowed that calf with lifelong immunity to cattle fever.

Most settlers to the West relied on Shorthorn cattle. This is an official breed (not just a description of its horns) that was developed in England. Pioneers need a type of cattle that could pull a cart, provide lots of milk, but also produce high quality milk, and the Shorthorn fulfilled all three criteria. Unfortunately, recently from England it had not developed immunity to Texas Fever, and whenever Texas Longhorns were driven in close to vicinity to Shorthorns, they left carcasses of dead cattle in their wake. The settlers didn't know what exactly caused Texas Fever, they just knew when the Longhorns arrived in warm weather, their Shorthorns died.

Knowing that Texas Fever could decimate their herds, settlers might pass laws against cattle drives in areas where a government existed, or charge high fees and allow drives only in winter when ticks were dormant. If there



was no government that could control drives through legislation, vigilante force would do.

The “Waterloo of sixty-six” illustrates the conflict between cattle drivers and settlers. With the war over by 1866, the enormous longhorn populations in Texas, high beef prices up north, and railroad depots in eastern Kansas, Texas ranchers rounded up large herds of cattle and started driving them north. As they traveled through Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma) and approached Kansas they met with great resistance.

Kansas passed laws forbidding the entrance of longhorns into the territory until the winter. Those who disobeyed and entered earlier might be fined, their cattle slaughtered, or themselves murdered. Some Missourians allowed the cattle into their territory, but for a few, and an additional

fee for each head of shorthorn they lost. While the herds waited for winter in Cherokee Territory the grass lost nutrients and the herds’ health diminished. Then, after the first frost and the grass completely died the prairie fires commenced, perhaps set by the Cherokee to force the Texans elsewhere. It is estimated that 240,000 cattle were driven into Indian Territory attempting to reach a railroad depot, but only a few thousand either made it through or lived to see another year. Thus the “Waterloo” of 1866 refers not to Emperor Napoleon’s defeat, but the victory of Kansas farmers over Texas cattlemen.

The key to getting cattle to the railroad depots then was to drive them to the most westward depot possible, containing the fewest settlers. An entrepreneur by the name of Joseph McCoy thought Abilene, Kansas the ideal spot. The Union Pacific Eastern Division (UPED) railroad company had been steadily laying tracks

across Kansas, already reaching Junction City and sure to go through Abilene soon. There was no reason for it to stop in Abilene, as it was more of a hamlet than a town, and that was ideal because McCoy envisioned driving thousands and thousands of Longhorns up to Abilene and didn’t want settlers around to cause a fuss. There was plenty of open range with healthy grass around Abilene for cattle to live on while they waited for the train.

McCoy worked with railroad companies to help him build a depot in the case cattle arrived. He then struck a deal with the Governor of Kansas to allow the Longhorns in Abilene, even though there was a state statute against it. McCoy had everything he needed to take the Longhorns from south Texas to New England ... everything except the cattle.



Figure 1—Types of maize

A trail is born

In 1861, years before McCoy’s vision for Abilene, Colonel William Emory needed to escape from southwestern Oklahoma to Fort

Leavenworth, Kansas. Emory was a Union officer, and the Confederates’ takeover of Texas meant he needed to vacate his troops to safer territory. To avoid Confederate troops Emory needed to take his troops straight north through Indian Territory, but this area was unknown to him or his maps. He needed a guide, and he found a reliable one in Captain Black Beaver, a Delaware Indian.

Black Beaver took Emory through a route that few but him knew, a route that would later go by the name Chisholm Trail.

When the Confederates learned that Black Beaver assisted the Union

they confiscated his property in southwestern Oklahoma, so he fled to a trading post operated by his friend Jesse Chisholm. No doubt, Black Beaver told Chisholm about the route he took.

Gauchos The Cowboys of South America

Spanish cattle made their way down to South America, their descendants becoming the Corriente breed used today for roping events in rodeo. They too, had to be driven to markets, and thus resulted in a similar cowboy culture of the southern hemisphere. Some of their challenges were the same, but different. Crossing rivers was doubly dangerous due to piranhas. They would kill a sickly cow, place it in the river to bait the piranhas downstream, after which the

The song *The Old Chisholm Trail* is said to have been sung by cowboys in the 1870's. Thought to be the most popular song among real cowboys driving cattle, the tune is based on an English tune that dates back to the 1640s. It was common for new cowboy song lyrics to be applied to old British songs. For example, *The Streets of Laredo* uses the tune from the old Irish song *The Bard of Armaugh*. You should know that the U.S. National *Anthem Star Spangled Banner* is also based on the English drinking song named *To Anacreon in Heaven*.

The Old Chisholm Trail

Oh come along, boys, and listen to my tale
I'll tell you all my troubles on the ol' Chisholm trail

Chorus: Come a-ti yi youpy youpy yea youpy yea

Come a-ti yi youpy youpy yea

On a ten dollar horse and a forty dollar saddle

I was ridin', and a punchin' Texas cattle

Chorus

We left ol' Texas October twenty-third

Drivin' up the trail with the U-2 herd

Chorus

I'm up in the morning before daylight

And before I sleep the moon shine bright

Chorus

It's bacon and beans most every day

I'd just as soon be eating prairie hay

Chorus

I woke up one morning on the Chisholm trail

With a rope in my hand and a cow by the tail

Chorus

Last night on guard, and the leader broke the ranks

I hit my horse down the shoulders and spurred him in
the flanks

Chorus

Oh, it's cloudy in the west, and a lookin' like rain

And my darned old slicker's in the wagon again

Chorus

Oh the wind commenced to blow and the rain began
to fall

And it looked by grab that we was gonna lose 'em all

Chorus

I jumped in the saddle an' I grabbed a-hold the horn

The best damned cowpuncher ever was born

Chorus

I was on my best horse, and a going on the run

The quickest shootin' cowboy that ever pulled a gun

Chorus

No chaps, no slicker, and it's pouring down rain

And I swear, by God, I'll never night herd again

Chorus

I herded and I hollered, and I done pretty well

Till the boss said, "Boys, just let 'em go to Hell."

Chorus

I'm going to the ranch to draw my money

Goin' into town to see my honey

Chorus

I went to the boss to get my roll

He figured me out nine dollars in the hole

Chorus

So I'll sell my outfit as fast as I can

And I won't punch cows for no damn man

Chorus

So I sold old baldy and I hung up my saddle

And I bid farewell to the longhorn cattle

Chorus

FARO

You need

- Two or more players
- Standard 52 card deck
- Extra set of 13 cards for each rank (i.e., a 2, a 3, ..., a ten, a jack, a queen, a king, and an ace)
- Betting chips for each player
- Penny for each player
- Dealing box
- *Take the 13 cards of each rank and arrange them face up on the table.*
- *The dealer (also called banker) takes the 52 card deck.*
- *Chips and a penny are given to each player.*

How to play

- The object is to win bets.
- The banker turns two cards over at a time. The first card is the losing card and the second card is the winning card.
- First, though, the banker flips over the top card in the deck.
- Players then place chips on one or more of the 13 cards they believe will be the winning card.
- Then the banker flips the next two cards: first one the losing card, second one the winning card.
- If a player bets a chip on a 5 and the losing card is a 5, the player loses that chip to the banker.
- If a player bets a chip on a 7 and the winning card is 7, the banker gives that player the amount they bet.
- The banker will then flip another two cards and the game continues, but first, the players are allowed to keep their bets or change their bets however they like.
- If the losing and winning card are the same rank, the banker takes half of the bets made on that rank.
- Before a round a player can bet that the winning card will be higher than the losing card. They do this by placing chips next to the deck. The banker remarks, "betting the high card".
- A player can bet on the losing card by placing a penny on top of their chips on the card they believe will be the losing card.
- They can also bet that the losing card is higher than the winning card by placing their penny on top of the chips placed next to the deck.
- All cards flipped remain up and visible to the players. They are typically placed in groups of the same rank (all the 2's together, all the 8's together, etc.)
- Once all four cards of the same rank have been flipped, betting on that rank is called a "dead bet". The first person (including the banker) to recognize a dead bet can take that bet for themselves.
- At end of the round there will be three cards remaining. Players have the option of betting on the order in which the last three cards will be flipped. If they guess correct they receive four times their bet (if the last three cards include a pair they win two times their bet).

Years later, after the war ended, Jesse Chisholm resumed his trading. One trip took him south following the path Black Beaver led Emory. Chisholm also knew how to navigate his way in unknown territory, and had a particular penchant for finding water sources. For example, he knew that buffalo knew where water was, and that they walked a straight path towards water but meandering paths away from it. Hence, wherever it was evident many buffalo were marching a straight line, that trail would lead to water. So all he needed from Black Beaver was a general description of the route and he could figure out the rest.

It was rainy on this trip and his wagon left deep ruts wherever it went, deep enough for other travelers to follow it easily. The path had ample forage and water, and little Indian presence. It was perfect for taking cattle from south Texas to Abilene, and that is what the cattle drivers then. Honoring the man whose wagon ruts led the way, the path became known as Chisholm Trail.

Today, that trail in Oklahoma is roughly U.S. highway 81, going through the towns of Duncan, Chickasha, El Reno, Kingfisher, and Enid. Outside of Duncan at Monument Hill you can still see wagon wheel ruts and cattle footprints left over from the cattle drives more than a century ago!

Certainly, cattle were driven in large numbers from one place to another before McCoy built his depot at Abilene. the Shawnee Trail is an example. But the Chisholm Trail was different in that it was longer, and the route wilder than others. Also important is that the trail created the quintessential cowtown. Abilene was basically nothing except a place where cattle were loaded onto trains, so all the businesses of Abilene existed to serve the cowboys, including saloons and prostitutes.

When the cowboys arrived after the two to three month journey they were finally paid and ready for some fun. First, though, they wanted to get clean. Boarding houses provided cots and rows of bathtubs and sinks. Toothbrushes hung by a string and were shared by the boarders (yuck!). Then it was time for the saloon, which looked identical to the saloons in western movies, with a long mirror allowing you to see behind you as you drink,

one spittoon for every five men, cowboys playing cards at a table, and swinging doors.

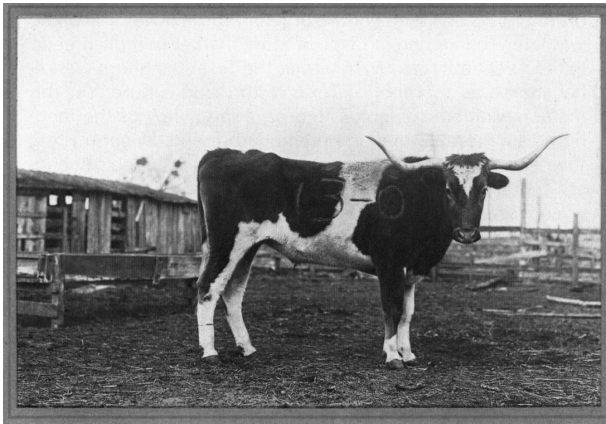
Card games included poker, but it was played with a twenty-card deck containing the face and ten card of each suit, and all twenty cards were dealt to the players at the beginning of each hand. The

most popular game was faro

They got drunk, paid for the company of girls, got into fights, and sometimes gambled all their money away. When journalists came to see Abilene they reported on this rowdy cowtown and didn't hesitate to exaggerate. From the ashes of their hyperbole came the cowboy culture that developed into wildly successful novels and movies.

Joseph McCoy's gamble to make some money thus created a brand new world: the wild, wild west. The stories about the west are full of adventure, for sure, but the truth is that, while there were

certainly moments of adrenaline, being a cowboy entailed extended bouts of boredom, fatigue, misery. What would American history be without drunk cowboys in shootouts and sheriffs with gigantic mustaches attempting to keep them under control, all under the watchful eyes of the prostitutes who wanted their money, and the journalists and writers who would exaggerate these hijinks to the city folks back east.



In 1920 the University of Texas purchased this Longhorn "Bevo" to be its mascot.

Unfortunately they did not have a good place to keep it and Texans are not as skilled in cattle ranching as Oklahomans, so they slaughtered and ate it.

The cattle drive

The Spanish cattle came to dominate Texas, but more for their tallow (rendered beef fat) and hides than their meat, which was lean and tough. Some of the cattle were

Herds could be as large as 10,000 head, but very large herds were more difficult to manage, so they would often be broken into smaller herds of about 1,000 head each.

Driving 1,000 head required at least eight cowboys: two leading in front of the herd, two on each flank, and two "drag riders" at the back of the herd. Ahead of the herd was the trail boss, behind him the cook and his chuck wagon, and behind the cook one or two wranglers responsible for the remuda (the herd of horses).

If all went well they would cover fifteen miles, including a break for lunch. The cowboying would continue into the night, where cowboys traded two-hour shifts staying up to make sure the herd stays together. But that was

only if the night was calm.

A stormy night had the potential to cause a stampede, so everyone (even the cook) would stay up singing to the herd to keep them calm. Lightning could easily cause a stampede, but once longhorns got skiddish even the slightest unusual noise (like the strike of a match) could set them running. Once a stampede began the cowboys would gallop alongside the herd, attempting to get near the front and cause the leaders to turn. Once they started turning, the cowboys would turn them more and more in the same direction, until the front of the herd reach the back. At this point the cattle would be going in circle, at which point the cattle were said to be “milling”. At this point the cattle are contained, will have difficulty running fast, and would hopefully settle down.

Getting them to mill wasn't always easy though, and if they don't the cowboys might spend days searching for the herd and bringing them together again. Sometimes Indians would covertly cause a stampede, and then charge the cowboys a fee to help them round them up again!

As every western movie viewer knows, crossing rivers was a particular dangerous part of the cattle drive. This is where you don't want cattle to mill. If they start across a river but then get scared along the way and turn to head back, they can end up milling in the river and eventually drowning. It was said that a particular bad river milling could drown up to 800 head.

The job of a cowboy was not fun. During the day it was boring, and because of the night shifts you were always sleepy. When it was boring it was likely due to a stampede at night where you stood a decent chance of dying. If it rained, you stayed in the rain and hopefully had a good slicker stored in the chuck wagon. If it rained at your night your only protection was a bedroll, which was like a sleeping bag with canvas on the outside and wood on the inside. There was no tent ... your sleeping bag was your test! The food was not good, usually tough beef, beans, sorghum molasses, and biscuits. Other times you would be served “son-of-a-bitch stew” which was a stew made from cattle hearts, testicles, and tongues.

The cowtown

The Chisholm trail was just one of many paths the cowboys and their longhorns traileed, and Abilene just one of a number of cowtowns with rowdy cowboys. Dodge City, Kansas would come to be the most renown and longest lived cowtown. This is where Doc Holliday (played by Val Kilmer in Tombstone) had his dentist office, and where Wyatt Earp helped enforce the law.

The term “red light district” stems from Dodge City, as the Red House brothel used to advertise their prostitutes behind red glass. Yes, it was a wild settings, replete with fighting and some shootouts, but the actual violence was exaggerated by journalists, and towns used to exaggerate the violence in competing towns to attract more business.

Shootouts barely resembled the wild west movies. To ensure they hit their victims, cowboys would draw their pistols slowly and aim carefully. Even though Wild Bill Hickok is reportedly the first to participate in the classes “walk and draw” gunfight, he often choose to protect himself with a sawed-off shotgun. Pistols fired one single bullet and was renown for innacuraccy. Shotguns fire many small bullets in a dispersed pattern, increasing the odds of hitting your enemy. Nathaniel K. Boswell is considered the most successful law officer by some, and instead of engaging in shootouts with a pistol he apprehended criminals by concealing himself then surprising them, holding a double barrel shotgun. Moreover, however ready cowboys were to spend their earnings in a night of fun, most did not carry weapons and preferred to settle arguments with fists. In fact, some cowtowns prohibited the carrying of any firearms, so you could say gun control was a part of America's earliest history!

For the most part, if you didn't want trouble, you wouldn't have any problem in a cowtown. Trouble came to those whou sought it. Americans back east had a misguided caricature of cowtown vilence largely due to dime store novels. Besides, violence was more prevalent in mining towns than cowtowns.

A riveting story will defeat the truth every time, though. Hyperbolic news stories and glamorized dime novels created an entirely new genre of literature, portraying a culture that existed for only about a decade in a few locations. These stories provided a sufficiently factual setting to help easterners understand what life was like west of the Mississippi, while providing enough entertainment to make reading worthwhile. They made real people like Kit Carson American heros, and gave John Wayne dozens of movie roles. Th genre is alive today, with remakes of classics like Rooster Cogburn and updated westerns like the Yellowstone American TV series.

The cowboy culture captivated not only Americans but the world. Germany in particular is enthralled with the cowboy and Indian setting. There are German bars where cowboy attire is mandatory. There are festivals where Germans go to dress as Indians and live in tepees for a day or two. This likely stems from a German novelist

named Karl May. Though he never set foot in America, he wrote stories about the wild west that enthralled people of East Germany, who lived under Soviet rule and had little access to quality television programs.

Open-range ranching

The further west railroad tracks were placed the more ranches were established. With so much land and the high cost of fencing these cattle operations operated on an “open range” basis. Cattle were allowed to wander over large areas, to be “rounded up” in the spring, where newborn calves would be branded to indicate ownership. A second roundup would occur in the fall, where steers would be segregated and for sale to slaughterhouses. Each roundup would take two weeks to a month

Ranches were no longer relying on the capture of wild longhorns for sale. While the longhorn was tough, their meat was of relatively low quality brought low prices. Their meat was jokingly said to be as juicy as a boiled grand piano, so there was interest in finding new breeds that could both flourish on the harsh range and bring a respectable price at market. The Shorthorn (also referred to as Durhams) accompanied pioneers as they pointed their wagon trains west was one of these breeds, but they were bred to receive daily care by humans and but the Hereford proved idea. They were tough but docile to handle, fast growing yet provided high quality meat and hence high prices. It did not take long for the Hereford to replace the Longhorn. By 1920 songs had been written about the last longhorn, and papers had already printed pictures of supposedly the last longhorn (not always of the same animal). The idea that the Longhorn could go extinct bothered people, and so groups started taking efforts to preserve the breed.

In 1927, the same year a New York Times article predicted the breed would disappear, a group gathered enough money to establish a Longhorn preserve in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. To this day they roam a fence free range of 60,000 acres, living like their feral ancestors did on the Texas Plains during the Civil War, untouched by humans save for when the herd is occasionally thinned.

Cowboys are no longer rounding up wild Longhorns and driving them to railroad depots. They are managing breeding stock, caring for them year round, and then

sending steers and heifers to the depots, where most would be taken to areas like Iowa for fattening up, and then to the big cities. Barbed wire had already been invented and commercialized in the late 1870s, but there was still so much land in the west and too few people to make it profitable to use (for now).

Yet the density of cattle and ranchers grew high enough that problems started to emerge, and these problems were exacerbated by the wealth inequality of those who were there. The possibility for large profits raising cattle in the west and selling them to the east enticed the wealthy to gamble large fortunes, especially around the area of Cheyenne, Wyoming. We tend to think of cowboys and ranchers as ordinary folk working hard to eke out a living, but in Cheyenne an enormous amount of land was held by a relatively few “cattle barons”.

They didn’t take shots of whiskey in a saloon and eat beans and biscuits. Instead they built clubs for them to host multicourse dinners, dressed in black tie, smoking cigars, and drinking champagne. The cowboys working for them were paid poorly and lived a meagre life. In the past cowboys were allowed to collect “mavericks” (cattle on the range with no brand and thus not explicitly owned by anyone) to supplement their wages and help them eventually establish a herd of their own, but the barons began to disallow this practice. On top of this, when beef prices fell cowboy wages were cut.

Stock growing associations were established by the cattle barons and was used as a way for them to gain greater control. Cowboys were not allowed to be members of the association, and tension between the barons and cowboys escalated, so much that cowboys periodically went on strike, with one lasting over two months. The strikes came to naught though, as the barons not only had the means to last them out but owned the newspapers and thus preventing the cowboys from soliciting the support of the public.

Animosity towards the cattle barons induced some to start stealing cattle, and the fact that some theft took place gave the barons justification for using violence to subjugate cowboys further. Cowboys now viewed the cattle barons as European serfs viewed the nobility: with hate and spite, but also an understanding they did not have the power to do much about their situation. Much of the cowboy work was seasonal, so they had to find alternative income sources during the winter.

The cattle barons most all came from money, and though they headed west for adventure and monetary boons, most sources indicate that they lost more money than they made. With less money to pay cowboys, but still possessing a desire to control all the land, tensions between cowboys and cattle barons were reaching a tipping point. At the same time, settlers were arriving, wanting to plant crops in the same areas cattle were grazing but with no fencing.

Cattle barons were losing money and cowboys had no money to begin with. Yes, it was cheap to raise cattle in Wyoming and prices were high in the east, but it was costly to get fed cattle (i.e., cattle ready for slaughter) to where it was consumed, and as more and more cattle were being raised the lower the price they received. Making profits was difficult even when the weather was favorable, so when record breaking cold and snow hit the west in the winter of 1886-87, ranches much of their herd, and this winter is thus referred to as the "Big Die-Up." Theodore Roosevelt reportedly lost two-thirds of his cattle. Some of the barons fled, unable to pay their investors, and those who remained came to terms with the fact that they had to change how they raised cattle. Instead of forcing cattle to fend for themselves on the open range, only to be rounded up occasionally and sold, ranches started installing barbed wire fences and growing hay for winter feed. The range became a ranch, and the cowboy became a cowhand.

Others barons were not ready to make this change, though, and the smaller ranches came out of the Big Die-Out relatively better off, diluting the power of the barons. Some of the barons suspected these smaller ranchers of stealing their cattle during the winter, and/or wanted to use the idea as an excuse to regain their power through violence. What ensued is known today as the Johnson County War.

The Johnson County War

Jim Averell and Ella Watson small homesteaders in Wyoming. (A homestead is a plot of land with a house, owned by a family and large enough for the family to be mostly self-sufficient.) This homestead was perfectly legal but happened to be surrounded by an open range operated by a baron named Bothwell, and Averell offended Bothwell by referring to barons as "nothing but rich land grabbers" in a local paper. It is generally accepted that Averell and Watson committed no crime, save for being an obstacle to Bothwell's designs for his own cattle kingdom, but that was sufficient to get them killed.

Bothwell took five members of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and lynched the couple. Their land and everything they owned then became his. Typically a cattle baron and his army of association members could hang whoever they like by simply claiming the victims stole cattle. (Fans of the television series *Yellowstone* will find this story familiar!). The newspapers owned and controlled by the barons then set about publishing stories of the lynching, saying Averell was a cattle rustler and Watson was a prostitute (even though prostitution wasn't a crime.) Three witnesses to the lynchings went missing, presumably assassinated (one being an eleven-year-old boy). With Bothwell's power as a baron, the association army the barons controlled, as well as the newspapers they owned, they were able to murder innocent people with abandon.


This pointed to a simple solution to the strife between cattle barons and homesteaders. Newspapers started printing fictitious stories about a cattle rustling problem in Johnson County, in the north party of Wyoming. The Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA) hired a group of thugs to begin killing settlers the barons did not like, claiming they were horse or cattle thieves.

The thugs tried to assassinate Nate Champion, but they failed, in the process one of the thugs was left behind and confessed. Two small ranchers by the name of Orley "Ranger" Jones, and John A. Tisdale witnessed this confession. Jones was then assassinated, and Tisdale later. The regular people of Johnson County saw in these murders something systematic and sinister on the part of the barons, while the barons protected the murderers and continued to use their newspapers to shield themselves from blame and prosecution. The cowboys and homesteaders began to recognize danger and the potential need to protect themselves, and so began carrying firearms wherever they went and ceased cooperating with the WSGA regarding when roundups would be conducted.

Meanwhile, the barons secretly plotted a violent invasion to remove everyone but themselves and their loyal workers from the county. Around 100 of the large barons belonging to the WSGA coordinated to hire twenty-five gunmen from Texas. The hired guns were referred to as "regulators", and their job was to take the "dead list" written by the barons and kill each of the seventy names on the list. Before heading towards Buffalo, Wyoming, where most of the names resided, they cut its telegraph line to the outside world, and the Wyoming Governor forbade troops at the nearby Fort McKinney from being mobilized. The plan was a blitzkrieg, to fall

Rodeo Events


Calf Roping / Tie-Down



Me calf roping in my first rodeo competition

The way it is supposed to work: you back your horse into the box, and nod your head when you are ready, after which they release the calf (always hornless). You then track the calf down and rope it. The other end of the rope is tied onto the saddle horn. As soon as you throw your rope you throw the slack to the side (so it doesn't get caught under neath your horse), during which your horse comes to an abrupt stop and you dismount (all three of these done at the same time). Your horse starts backing up while you are running towards the calf. Upon reaching the 250 lb calf you throw it down and tie its feet together, and they must stay tied for six seconds. If you do all this the fastest you win!

How it would go for me: I didn't have a great calf roping horse. Instead of stopping and backing up when I dismounted, she would follow me as I ran towards the calf, so I always had to outrun my horse to get to the calf LOL!



Cowboy keeps the "piggin string" in his mouth until he reaches the calf, after which it is used to tie three of the calves' feet together.

The first calf roping championship went to Everett Bowman from Hillsdale, Arizona in 1929



Calf roping contestant from the OSU Rodeo Team

The fastest recorded time is 6.5 seconds

Rodeo Events

Team Roping

Team roping is the only team event in rodeo. The job of the header is to rope the steer by the horns, then dally (wrap the rope around the saddle horn) and turn the steer to its left. The heeler then approaches the steer from behind, and throws the rope in front of the hind legs and underneath the steer's belly. As the steer moves forward it walks into the loop, after which the heeler dallies. The header and heeler lightly stretch the steer so that it falls down. Fastest time wins. If the heeler only catches one leg then five seconds is added to the time.



swiftly on each name, one at a time, with such a large force that the others could not be warned. To the barons and the regulators it seemed like a plan that couldn't fail.

They first went after Nate Champion, but when they fell upon his house, Nate and others easily repelled them and held them at bay, causing a long shootout to ensue. A man named Jack Flagg was on his way to Nate's homestead. Jack was also on the list, and when he saw the shootout he rightly suspected foul play and quickly galloped back to warn others. Before the regulators could taken Nate's house, an alert was going out to all the others on the list, and of course those others banded together to fight back. Instead of a systematic and smooth series of assassinations what took place was a war: the Johnson County War.

The regulators were outnumbered, and they were eventually chased into a building. As the regulators tried to hold off the Wyoming settlers and townspeople, a shootout lasting days took place. Meanwhile, the Buffalo townspeople had captured a supply wagon that contained an enormous amount of ammunition and the dead list, providing proof that the regulators were not arresting cattle stranglers but were in fact an assassination squad.

The regulators eventually managed to alert the Wyoming governor, who sent in the U.S. Army to protect the regulators and take them into custody.

The war of guns then evolved into a war of law. The barons and the politicians and newspapers they owned raised legal and public relations defenses for the regulators (in addition to killing and paying off witnesses) while the Wyoming people sought to prosecute the regulators and the barons. In the courtroom the rich usually win, and that is what happened here.

The regulators and the barons who hired them got away with murder, but their plan to take control of the wild west and make it their kingdoms also failed. Many historians place the Johnson County War as a turning point in American history, where the wild wild west evolved into simply the west. I believe it is an apt story to the settlement of the U.S. It is a reminder that the story involved far more than settlers and cowboys versus nature, or settlers and cowboys versus Native Americans. It was also a story of rich versus non-rich, the honest versus the scoundrel. It is a story that took place in every other region of America, but what makes the story of the wild wild west unique is the the presence of an identity that has existed in only one place and one area in time: the cowboy.

Rodeo

Decades before the big cattle drives, cowboys were rounding up cattle, roping calves, and branding them. This naturally led to competitions between the cowboys as to who had the best skills. Once such event that took place in 1847 Santa Fe is described by a historian as follows, "This roundup is a great time for the cowhands ... They contest with each other for the best roping and throwing and there are horse races and whisky and wines."

The Spanish word for "to surround" is "rodear" or "rodeo" which is Anglicized to "roundup", and over time such competitions became more formal and became known as "rodeo". The best contestant for the first rodeo is a July 4, 1869 event in Deer Trail, Colorado, when neighboring ranches got together to settle an argument over which set of cowboys had the best skills. The event involved breaking horses, which amounted to seeing who could ride the wildest bucking horses they could find the longest, with the winner received a new suit of clothes. The winner was Emiline Gardenshire, a hand from the Milliron Ranch, after he rode the bronc Montana Blizzard for fifteen minutes. This type of competition is still alive today in the bronc riding rodeo contest.

Other areas followed with similar contests: Cheyenne, Wyoming (1872), Winfield, Kansas (1882), and Pecos, Texas (1883). These were mostly displays of roping and riding, not formal competitions with well defined rules.

These events presumably drew a crowd, suggesting they could make money if marketed better, and so Buffalo Bill Cody hosted an event 1882 where the winners received money, and Prescott, Arizona claims to have hosted the first "formal" rodeo in 1888. They were typically held as Fourth of July celebrations. The event evolved and spread, such that today when most people see a cowboy for the first time it is a contestant in a rodeo. These are one version of the modern cowboy, still using many of the tools as those before them on the open range. There is another version of the modern cowboy: one who still raises cattle on the open range, still relying to a large on lariats and horses (but when needed drones and helicopters may be employed).

The greatest cowboy of all

The cowboy lives still, not only in rodeo contests and ranches, but as the mascot of the world's greatest school: Oklahoma State University. The OSU Cowboys dominate football, wrestling, and golf, while the OSU Cowgirls are victorious in tennis and softball. While all the students are "cowpokes", the official mascot is a cowboy by the

name of Pistol Pete. It would be a sin, then, to study the cowboy without discussing the life of the real Pistol Pete: Frank Eaton.

Frank Eaton is a legend both figuratively and literally, in that stories of his life abound but little can be verified. Much of what is documented is found in his autobiography, a book that certainly contains many truths but just as surely is embellished.

His story starts in 1860 Connecticut, born to an abolitionist father who fought for the North in the Civil War. When the family moved to Kansas in 1867, the war may have ended but animosities lingered, and the father was killed by former confederates. A friend of the family then remarked young Frank Eaton, “My boy, may an old man’s curse rest upon you, if you do not try to avenge your father!” It is possible this happened, but at the same time, the reader will agree this is a familiar trope in fiction, so from the beginning we grin at what might be a tarradiddle, and admit with a little shame that we do prefer an interesting lie to a boring truth.

From then until 1881, Frank devoted his life to killing his father’s murderers. This first entailed becoming skilled with a gun. His specialization was a pistol, and by the age of fifteen he was good, but he wanted to learn more. By then he lived in northeastern Oklahoma, a region belonging to the Cherokee. Frank set out for Fort Gibson, a one week’s ride southeast, hoping the soldiers there would give him lessons, which they did. Towards the end of his visit a shooting contest was held, and while the soldiers were better marksmen with a rifle, none of them were more accurate with a pistol. Before he left they awarded him a badge to honor his shooting ability, and as a Colonel

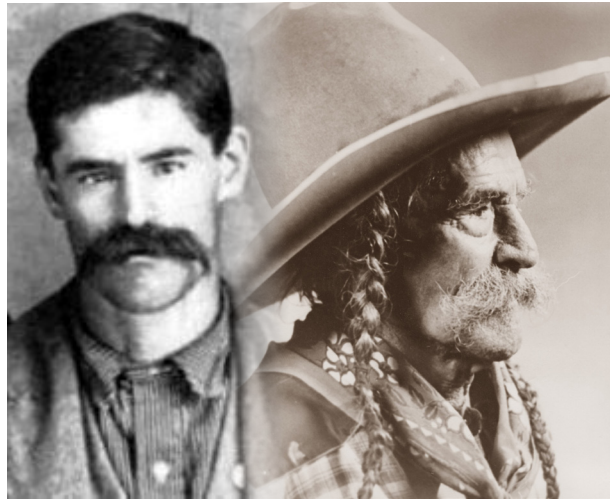
pinned it on him he remarked, “I am giving you this badge for your fine marksmanship and I am going to give you a new name. From now on you are Pistol Pete!” And that’s how Frank Eaton became Pistol Pete!

This story is believable enough, but others in the autobiography stretch into incredulity. The number of times a man’s head is shot off compared to the number of times a man is shot doesn’t seem realistic. In a dual, Pistol Pete supposedly shot the gun out of his opponent’s hand on purpose, instead of trying to kill him, which is a risky strategy for a sane man. In one dual Pete faced three renown gunslingers, and though he won the shootout one of his guns was damaged, and so a friend offered him his pistol instead—the same pistol used

to kill Billy the Kid!

Then there is this story. After earning his first kiss from a Catholic girl, he then had to go hunt down some thieves (Pete was a U.S. Marshall also, the story goes). Before he left she removed the crucifix from around her neck and placed it around his. Later, in a gunfight, Pistol Pete is shot in the chest—but there was no blood! What could have stopped the bullet? The crucifix, of course (we’ve seen that movie before). Even Pistol Pete himself seems to suggest a whopper when he writes (after telling this story), “I know many stories like this had been told—but this really happened to me.”

There is much in the autobiography that seems realistic, though, and from them we can enhance our understanding of the cowboy. For example, for a period of his life Pistol Pete was a “line rider”. This was a system used to help contain herds of cattle on the open range, before barbed wire fence. Any one ranch would be enormous in terms of

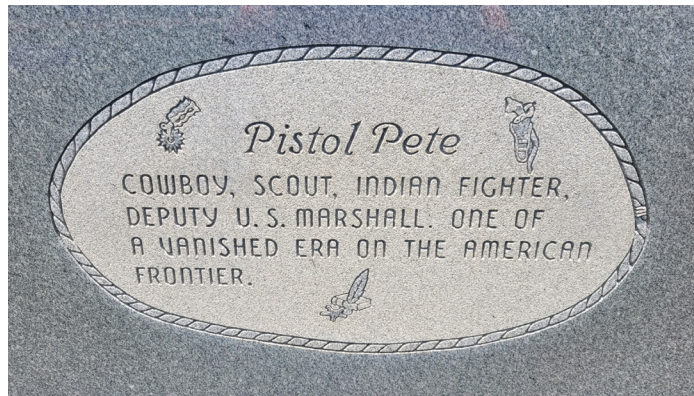


The real Frank Eaton / Pistol Pete



OSU’s mascot Pistol Pete

land size. Cabins would be built around the perimeter of the ranch, with one or two riders residing in each. Each day the line riders would mount and begin riding towards another cabin, meeting the other rider who was



Frank Eaton / Pistol Pete's grave in Perkins, Oklahoma (west side)



Frank Eaton / Pistol Pete's grave in Perkins, Oklahoma (east side)

doing the same. After meeting, they would turn around and head back to their cabin. Along the way the rider would turn back any cattle that were straying, and be on the lookout for tracks of herds that ventured beyond the ranch boundary. If such a crossing was found, the rider would make a mark on the ground the other rider would see, and then head off to capture and return the herd to the ranch.

Fans of the Yellowstone series will find some familiar themes in the autobiography. For example, cattlemen's associations had legal authority. They would hire US Marshalls as a "troubleshooter", meaning the Marshall was paid but only had to render service is needed, like if cattle were stolen and the Marshall was needed to track and arrest / kill the thieves.

At the age of 21 Pistol Pete was hired out to a group

to deliver 4,900 cattle from central Texas to the Osage Agency in Pawhuska. This group consisted of ten cowboys, a cook, a chuck wagon, and several horses for each man. The Canadian river was renown for quicksand, and one patch caught fifty cattle. To rescue them, the men had to get completely naked, enter the quicksand



*Article from The Cleveland American
September 17, 1942
Cleveland, Oklahoma*

(presumably attached to a rope), and approach the cattle. They would take the cattle and lift the tail and legs out of the quicksand, roll them on their sides with their legs tied together, fasten a rope to their horns, and then pull them out with horsepower.

Pete eventually found himself living in Perkins, becoming quite popular at Oklahoma A&M University (which would become Oklahoma State University in 1957) and the surrounding area, demonstrating his shooting skills, playing the fiddle, and telling stories. His demeanor was ornery but playful, a trait manifested in the design of Pistol Pete the mascot. Papers would occasionally run stories on him, and in 1923 he rode a horse during the Armistice Parade in Stillwater. At the time the university's mascot was the "tigers", and as a group of students saw him pass by they decided he would make a far better mascot. Their campaign to change mascots quickly resulted in success, with Frank Eaton's enthusiastic approval, of course.

I like to think that OSU has the greatest mascot of any school. It is a mascot with true personality, where in one ornery oversized head you can see the book's worth of American history. It is a mascot that, so far, thankfully, is immune to cancel culture. No, we don't know the "real" Frank Eaton, and we frankly don't care, for this Pistol Pete is a mascot whose main job is to be larger than life.

It is a mascot that other schools have shamelessly copied (I'm looking at you, New Mexico State University and the University of Wyoming). Wyoming claims they came up with the Pistol Pete mascot first but they have no

proof and so we must conclude they are dirty rotten liars. Texas Tech has the “Red Raider”, which is essentially a generic version of Pistol Pete, one that dons a mask to hide their shame of copying us.

Contrast our mascot with that of OU, the Sooners, who were literally cheaters in the Oklahoma land runs. Only a school whose football team has to cheat to win games would choose a cheater as a mascot. At least OU put some effort into choosing a mascot. Kansas State asked themselves, “What is the most unimaginative mascot we could possibly choose?” and naturally selected the wildcat.

The University of South Carolina “gamecocks” chose a chicken to represent their sport teams, as if they wanted to announce their desire not to be taken seriously. At least the Gamecock is a fighting chicken; the University of Delaware chose the “fighting blue hen”. Virginia Tech settled for the “hokie”, which to my understanding is an effeminate turkey. The “Crimson Tide” representing the University of Alabama is the red dirt that once stained their uniforms—they literally named themselves after dirt (which if you ever meet an Alabama alumnus is actually understandable).

So yes, Oklahoma State University indeed has the greatest mascot of any school. No wonder we are eternal bedlam champions!

