



ROPIN' GENEALOGIES ALONG THUH OLD FRONTIER

A HUMOROUS WESTERN BALLAD

By Harold Hersey

(Owen P. White says in his well-written book, Them Was the Days, that "a man's pedigree in the Southwest in the eighties and nineties was more of a liability than an asset, and as any reference to anybody's ancestry was couched in such uncomplimentary language that a killing became immediately necessary, very little, if any, investigation along genealogical lines was ever indulged in.")

IT WUZ blazin' hot and I don't mean maybe when Joe asked Steve for fun:
"Have yuh got some toast in yuhr trousers' pants, yuh lazy son-of-a-gun?"
"For why?" asked Steve in a plaintive way, thumbs hooked in hiz calfskin vest.
"Wall," answered Joe, "I'm a poached egg, son, and I wants a place tuh rest."

WHILE Joe wuz dodgin' Stevie's fists and thuh crowd wuz shoutin' its glee
Thar appeared an old maid on the edge of latitude eighty-three.
Her face wuz a map in high relief, showin' winter had done her wrong. . . .
She'd skipped over spring and summer and fall; her face it wuz lean and long.

SHE wore those mittens thuh fingers stick through; her hands they wuz knotted and worn.
She stood surveyin' thet Rawhide crowd with a most contemptu's scorn.
Joe spoke in sneakin' confidence: "Gosh! she's lookin' at me.
"If they sent her yere by thuh fast express I hope she ain't C.O.D."

SHE'S gazin' at them through fancy specs perched on the end of a stick,
And she takes out a paper, examines it close, then speaks out nervous and quick.
"I'm a genealogical student," sez she. "I came out here to find
"The actual names and the histories you men have left behind."

IF yuh've ever been in a honkatonk when thuh noise iz flyin' high,
Thuh gents exchangin' drinks and yarns, when someone sez: "Yuh lie!"
Yuh'd have some idee of thuh silence greetin' what she said. . . .
If she hadn't been a woman we'd a-filled her full of lead.

JOE'S gallant with the gals, he iz, so when it seems as though
We'd never crack thet atmosphere, he speaks out, bowin' low:
"In Rawhide, M'am, it's etikette tuh be jest what yuh be,
"Tharfore we ain't been hankerin' much for ge-ner-ol-o-gy."

THET lady riz ten inches higher, lookin' through her specs.
She made 'em rub their stubby beards and scratch their sunburnt necks.
Steve kinda sidled by head down as though tuh reach thuh door
When she ups suddenly and sez: "What are you leaving for?"

“**W**HAT is your name, kind friend, and why?” “I’m like thuh mule,” sez he;
 “No pride in my ancestors and no hope of immortality.”
 She bristled up like a porkypine and backin’ tuh thuh door
 Quick as a flash they caught thuh sight of a shinin’ forty-four.

“**L**INE UP against the bar, my friends,” she mutters dignified.
 Surprised? Good Lor’ thar warn’t one thar who’d brag about hiz pride.
 With steady hands she loosens up a long black cloak she had
 And yuh could see by thuh way she moved thet she wuz hoppin’ mad.

“**N**OW sir!” she sez, addressin’ Steve: “A man, it seems to me,
 “Who had a mother once should study genealogy.
 “Just give me full particulars. Your father’s name? Your mother?
 “Your uncles, aunts and relatives, a sister or a brother?”

NOW Stevie hadn’t giv’ hiz name and none would dare tuh ask
 Unless it happened they’d imbibed tuh deeply from a flask.
 He stuttered, turned magenta hue, then’ sed arter awhile:
 “Muh name iz Thom’son . . . Boston born . . . I wuz an only chile.

“**M**UH parents died when I wuz young. . . . Once Horace Greeley said:
 “Go West, young man,’ but he had died, so I went tuh jail instead.
 “When I wuz freed thar warn’t nowhere fer me tuh go but yere
 “Whar ev’ry man’s an equal, M’am, along thuh Old Frontier.”

A DROPPIN’ pin would easy been a cannon’s loud report
 In thet thar silence followin’ this . . . but he wuz sure a sport.
 Thuh old maid hesitated some: “You spoke out honest, sir . . .
 “Let’s save our time. . . . I’m looking up the name of Bannister.”

ONE of thuh gals named Margaret had moved ‘round near thuh door
 And suddenly she screams and grabs thuh old maid’s forty-four.
 Like wildcats tusslin’ back and forth them women clawed and scratched. . . .
 Yuh’d think some bird of hell had laid two eggs thet sudden hatched.

THEN suddenly thuh old maid’s dress wuz ripped clean off her back. . . .
 We turns in shame, but Margaret she hands her smack for smack,
 A-yellin’: “Boys, look at them pants!” We does, and sure enuf
 It only wuz a man disguised and puttin’ up a bluff.

IN jest a jiffy he wuz stripped of ev’ry gew and gaw,
 A-sittin’ silent in a chair a-waitin’ Frontier law.
 Soon Margaret she got her breath. “I doubted when he spoke,
 “But I knew he warn’t no woman when he opened up his cloak.

“**C**OSS a woman sews her buttons on the left side, not thuh right.
 “He fumbled kinda foolish like . . . hiz clothes wuz awful tight.”
 They stood thar gapin’ at thuh fellow sittin’ in thuh chair
 And consternation sure had come and settled ev’rywhere.



NOW unexpected come a voice out of thuh crowd thet stood
 All silent in thuh honkatonk, some of 'em knockin' wood.
 "I am thuh Bannister whut this cheap crook iz lookin' for."
 And sech a bum ez never wuz sneaks out across thuh floor.

LONG whiskers full of alkali . . . so thin in hiz ragged coat
 He mighta fell down through a flute and never struck a note.
 "This yere's my younger brother, John, a good-for-nothin' cuss."
 And thuh fellow in thuh chair he cusses rich and gener'us.

A-STRAININ' at thuh straps thet held him, glarin' awful mean
 As though hiz brother's thuh toughest sight thet he hez ever seen.
 "John warn't no earthly good a-tall," thuh desert rat goes on;
 "He pizened Dad ag'in me after I wuz gone. . . ."

"A-SAYIN' I hed stole some cash whut he himself hed took
 "And brandin' me whar I come from a measly sneakin' crook. . . .
 "Forgettin' I hed larned tuh wait and settle up hiz hash
 "He pizened good old Dad ag'in me after I wuz gone. . . ."

"TWO weeks ago I found a paper readin' Dad he'd died. . . ."
 When sayin' this thuh desert rat stood blazin' up in pride.
 "So I suspects he'd fork a train, believin' I wuz yere
 "Content tuh find myself ag'in along the wide frontier.

"HE'S jest a rattler, gents, whut strikes afore yuh gits a chance.
 "But I have figgered out a plan to make my brother dance.
 "Pick out an empty room close by and in thuh dark we'll fight
 "With one good Bowie knife apiece and God will say who's right."

"WAL, fight 'er out," Steve bellows loud, "and may thuh best man win.
 "Until yuh knocks or calls for help we won't come buttin' in."
 One brother cringin', whimperin' like . . . thuh other peeved and sore . . .
 Went intuh thet thar pitch-dark room and Stevie locked thuh door.

THUH first ten minutes warn't so bad . . . they simply holds their breath
 A-wonderin' what iz happenin' thar in thet room of death.
 But twenty . . . thirty . . . minutes passed . . . forty . . . forty-five . . .
 And Stevie turns tuh Joe and asks: "Iz nary one alive?"

"THAR ain't a sound inside," sez Joe, "I'm goin' in tuh see."
 And with them words he reaches out and quickly turns thuh key. . . .
 No sound from thet thar hole of hell! . . . "Bring me some sorta light!"
 They does . . . and in he goes alone . . . thuh others cold with fright. . . .

JOE bends down close, thuh light in hand. "Say, this one's breathin' low. . . .
 They lifts him up, but Stevie whispers: "Careful, take him slow.
 "Jest lay him on thuh table thar . . . go git thuh sawbones quick. . . ."
 It tuk a month tuh come around, but good health did thuh trick.



THIS feller Bannister went back and claimed thuh family plate
Then he returns and buys a ranch big as an Eastern state.
Yep! he's thuh Governor, and smart . . . say, stranger, watch your step . . .
He's honest as thuh day iz long and jealous of hiz rep.

JOE runs hiz "Double Circle" Ranch and Stevie owns thuh store
Whar once thar stood thuh honkatonk with bar and sawdust floor.
Jest look at Main Street stretchin' out. We paved her down last year.
We celebrates with round-ups now. Thar ain't no more Frontier.