

Film, Media and Museum Reviews

Museums

National Rodeo Hall of Fame at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. 1700 Northeast 63rd Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73111. Dr. Bobby Weaver, Assistant Director (405) 478-2250.

Prorodeo Hall of Fame & Museum of the American Cowboy. 101 Pro Rodeo Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80919-2396. Patricia A. Florence, Assistant Director & Curator (719) 593-8847.

National Cowgirl Hall of Fame & Western Heritage Center. 515 Avenue B, P.O. Box 1742, Hereford, TX 79045. Ms. Jackie Hammett, Administrator (806) 364-5252.

Cowboys and cowgirls rope and ride and perform amazing feats in the lively rodeo exhibits at these three museums. All have excellent, accurate, and informative displays which make use of artifacts, photos and archival material to explain rodeo history, events, and equipment, as well as the careers and achievements of pioneer athletes. A visit to any one of the three will provide new insights into the history of the sport and the people who contributed to its development.

Besides exhibits, all contain invaluable primary materials for historical research. These include extensive files on individual honorees, nominees, and notables; large photo archives; and collections of scrapbooks, costumes, trophies, and other artifacts. Finally, all maintain art galleries, libraries, and gift shops. Despite their similarities, each facility has its own unique character, and notable holdings.

The National Rodeo Hall of Fame is part of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, and was founded by the Rodeo Historical Society in 1966 to collect and preserve material concerning rodeo history, and to memorialize great rodeo performers and professionals. The sixty-four hundred square foot hall contains three exhibits. One features individual honorees, while a second devoted to rodeo history and featuring an outstanding selection of costumes, opened in December, 1989. A third explaining the five basic rodeo contests, is due to open in early 1990. The archives hold vast files pertaining to the 134 honorees as well



Buffalo Bill Statue. National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City.

as to countless nominess, and a mammoth photo collection. Most significant are the only complete set of the very first rodeo trade publication, *The Wild Bunch*, (1915-1917), and a large collection of rare glass plate negatives by the greatest early rodeo photographer, R. R. Doubleday. Also helpful are the many related exhibits in the other areas of the Cowboy Hall of Fame.

The Prorodeo Hall of Fame is the official museum of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), and part of the PRCA Headquarters complex. It was founded in 1979 to assure that future generations would understand the role



Exterior of the Prorodeo Hall of Fame and Museum of the American Cowboy showing the monumental bronze of Casey Tibbs, entitled "The Champ."

of the cowboy in American culture. It has twenty-five thousand feet of exhibit space, much of it in the "Hall of Champions," which is devoted to the 91 honorees. The most outstanding exhibit explains the history of the PRCA, and has recently added a section on the National Finals Rodeo. A third room will soon be showing paintings by western artist Walter Piehl. There are also two theaters showing documentary films. Significant holdings include the records of the PRCA itself from its 1936 founding; an extensive collection of rodeo programs, prize lists, and day sheets from all over North America; and official and unofficial rodeo publications.

The National Cowgirl Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center was founded in 1975 by the Board of Directors of the Deaf Smith County, Texas, Chamber of Commerce. It was intended as a unique and inspirational way to boost civic pride, and the community has supported it enthusiastically ever since. Although the Cowgirl Hall is the only one of the three not staffed by professional archivists, it has equally professional exhibits, and exceptionally well maintained and organized archives. There are 6,000 square feet of exhibit space in five rooms. They show achievements of honorees, costumes, trophies, gear, and memorabilia, with the costumes, trophies and prize saddles being most notable.

The most significant aspect of the Cowgirl Hall is its emphasis on the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA), which was formed in 1948



Costume Exhibit. National Cowgirl Hall of Fame & Western Heritage Center, Hereford, Texas.

as the Girl's Rodeo Association. Many WPRA founders and pioneer leaders are among the fifty-three cowgirl honorees (there have also been fifty Western Heritage honorees), and their generous donations of scrapbooks, photographs and programs from All Girl Rodeos make this a unique source for information about the oldest organization of female professional athletes in the United States.

While none of these three has research facilities as such, all are hospitable and helpful, and provide a clean well-lighted place in which to work. They will also locate materials, provide for photocopying, and take orders for photos. In all three, you will be allowed to use your own writing materials, and bring notes, etc. with you. Since all are understaffed, it is most helpful to write or call ahead with your schedule and the subject of your search.

There appears to be no notably negative feature about any of these museums, except for space and staff problems common to research facilities everywhere. All have succeeded in organizing preserving an amazing array of artifacts, and

making them available for research and display. Perhaps most important, the exhibits carefully balance the needs both of honoring their inductees and educating the public.

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