

EDITOR'S CORNER

Reasonable minds may disagree, but it's hard to imagine who the quintessential American hero is if it's not the cowboy.

Like memories of the Wild West itself—a time and place of which they formed such an integral part—traces of the cowboy long outlived the years during which they flourished, and still dot the Great Plains physical and mental landscape.

Indeed, today's cowboys often consciously—perhaps sometimes unconsciously—emulate the figures that populated the days of yore. And it was thus even in times when veterans of the Long Drive still rode the range. My father, Tim McCoy, was a Wyoming cowboy long before he became a Hollywood cowboy in the 1920s. In his autobiography, he remembered the fascination he and his fellow cowboys displayed for their life-based, yet larger-than-life image: "Zane Grey was widely read during the long, dark winter in the scattered bunkhouses throughout the West. Clarence Mulford's *Hopalong Cassidy*, Frank Spearman's *Whispering Smith*, Owen Wister's *The Virginian* all fed the cowboy's vision of himself as the last holdout on the last frontier." And later? "They were the most dedicated Western-watchers Hollywood ever had."

Most cowboys have always felt they belonged to a special breed, a kind of elite group. Early on in his classic book *The Log of a Cowboy*, which first appeared in 1903, Andy Adams—some of his quotes can be found in this issue's photo portfolio section—tells of his main character's brothers: "They had been up the trail, and the wondrous stories they told about the northern country set my blood on fire."

Neither Andy Adams, nor any of the rest of us who love the Great Plains, would have it any other way. So saddle up and join us in exploring some of the terrain in the cowboy's world through the intriguing articles we've put together for this theme issue of *Heritage*.

Ron McCoy
Editor