



Revised History

Oklahoma Memories—Raymond and Henry

By Al Benson May 29th, 2022

Being that this is a holiday weekend I thought I'd pass along a little easier reading than the things I usually deal with. Even I need a break from the heavy stuff that goes down almost every day. So here she goes.

In my brief time living in Oklahoma back in the late 1960s I got to know a man who had been a trick roper in rodeos. His name was Raymond. Somehow, he had hurt his back and so his rodeo days were over. He lived in the backroom of a pawnshop in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. At one point, so I was told, he played a guitar and entertained in local bars on weekends. That was before I knew him. Not everyone appreciated Raymond's music and singing. A man in Bartlesville told my dad once, regarding Raymond's music that "He wasn't very good, but he sure as hell was loud."

I never heard him play all that much, so I'm no judge. But what he did, from the little I did hear, sounded like pure country music to me.

One thing Raymond could still do, though, was to make that trick rope sing. On several occasions I got to watch him do his routines with that rope and it was always enjoyable. He would build a big loop, either horizontally or vertically, and jump in and out of it and never miss a step, never trip himself up. He did things with that rope I couldn't begin to describe. It has been too many years now and I can't remember what all he did, only that it was enjoyable to watch him do it. Any of you all that have been to rodeos and watched trick ropers will know what I'm talking about. Raymond was one of the interesting characters I saw while in Oklahoma.

Another one was a man named Henry Wells. Although I saw quite a bit of Henry, I never got to talk to him, although lots of folks in Bartlesville knew him. When we saw Henry, on and off during the 1960s, he was old, with snow white hair and a handlebar mustache just like Wyatt Earp's.

In his younger days, before my time, Henry had been a train robber, part of the Al Spencer gang, so I was told. Seems he had been captured leaving the scene of a robbery and he did some time in jail. I don't know how much of his loot, if any, he ever salted away. But the old timers around Bartlesville always said they never saw Henry work, but that he always had money. So, who knows?

Sometime in the 1960s an artist passing through Bartlesville had painted a picture of Henry that looked just like him. When we lived in Oklahoma that picture resided in the pawn shop Raymond lived in the back room of. I would have loved to have been able to buy that picture, but just couldn't afford it—and the pawnshop owner figured he'd never be able to sell it for what he gave the artist for it. The pawnshop owner was another interesting character who often wore an old derby hat and kidded Raymond and I about the cowboy hats we wore. At one point he put several of my paintings in his front window and if I recall correctly, he sold four of them for me and never charged me anything for having them on display.

This is just a brief recollection of some of the interesting people I saw while living in Oklahoma. My Dad and I used to go into Bartlesville to do our shopping and pick up our mail. Actually, we lived a bit west of there, just over into Osage County, which had once been the old Osage Indian Reservation. Those were interesting days for me to look back on.