

Wallowa History Center *Preserving Our Past for the Future*

*The Wallowa History Center works to save the memories, stories,
and photographs that define the history and culture of the places we call home.*

– Newsletter Number 8 • June 2007 –

The following is based on the author's 40-year friendship with the subject of the story, Lew Minor. At the time of Minor's ride, the Pendleton Round-up was only three years old, yet still drew as many as 30,000 spectators. The "World Champion" title given to event winners seems to have been either part of the Round-up's promotion or a designation of the *National Police Gazette*.

World Champion Bronc Rider from Wallowa County

Written by Alan D. Victor

Photographs provided by Rick Steber, from his book *Wild Horse Rider*

Lew Minor was born in Wallowa Valley on Friday, July 13, 1884. He rode a calf when he was five years old and said he wanted to be a bronc rider when he grew up. He got his first horse when he started school and had to ride two miles to get there. He was fifteen when he broke a horse for a neighbor, and eighteen when he won first place and fifteen dollars in a bucking contest at the Wallowa County Fair.

After seeing Lew at the county fair, Wayne Wade gave him a job running a herd of cattle on Devils Washboard. The Washboard was hilly country. It was so remote and rugged no other rancher had attempted to run cattle there. Lew took the job. In the fall, Wade said the calves were big and healthy, and the cows were as fat as cows can get.

On Wade's recommendation, the McDonald Brothers, Johnny and Hec, gave Lew a job breaking remounts to be sold to the army, which would not buy horses unless they had been ridden at least once. Lew took the job. He rode six days a week, one horse after another, and he never seemed to get enough.

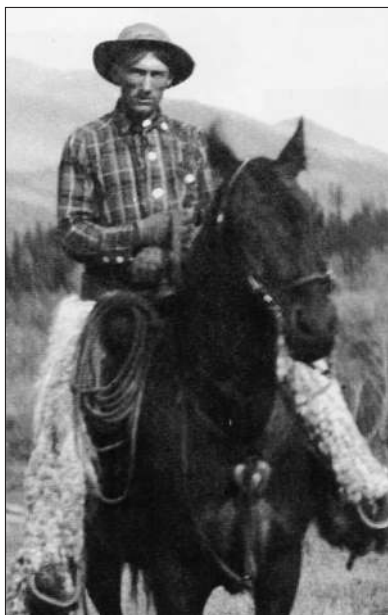
One day at the barber shop in Wallowa, the barber was sitting in his chair facing the street when he saw something that caused him to cry out, "Jesus Christ!" There was Lew on a bucking horse, which had slipped in a mud puddle and was falling. Lew landed on his shoulder, broke it, and was laid up three weeks while the shoulder healed.

Another time, a sunny spring day, Lew was on his way to Wallowa when he was overtaken by a rider who said his name was Wren. He said he had 700 head of horses that had to be green-broke by the middle of July. He needed two bronc riders. Did Lew want the job, and did he know of any other bronc riders wanting work? Lew's answer to both questions was "Yes." His friend Orv Hearing was a bronc rider. The pay was twenty bucks and room and board per month.

By the middle of July, Lew and Orv had decided they would have to start looking for new work. They headed for Nevada. They took the stage to Elgin, then traveled by train to Winnemucca. When they stopped at the Stockman Bar, they were approached by a man who said his name was Webb. He said he was from Lovelock, sixty miles down the road, and was in need of two bona fide horse trainers.



Lew Minor, 1910



Lew Minor, 1912

“I hear you are qualified along that line,” Webb said, “so the pay is ten bucks each to make mustangs into saddle horses.”

Lew said, “Mr. Webb, you have a deal.”

In the days ahead, Lew and Orv worked Webb’s horses and, for the fun of it, Lew rode exhibitions on Lovelock’s Main Street. Local ranchers brought in the worst-tempered horses they could find, and Lew rode every one. After the horses were shipped out, Webb said that Lew and Orv were the best men he had ever employed.

After returning to Winnemucca they were hired by Sibble Reed, who was foreman of The Double Square, the largest horse outfit in the country. It ran 10,000 head. Their pay was seventy-five dollars per month plus room and board. Most days, Lew rode on the backs of at least forty horses.

One spring, Orv was trying to cross the Humboldt River at flood stage. His horse fell, and Orv drowned. Lew, using a boat and grapple hooks, located Orv’s body and then put it on the train for Wallowa. At Elgin he hired a dray to take the body on to Wallowa. At the canyon, the entrance to Wallowa Valley, Lew turned to the pine box and said, “Sit up Orv—we’re

home.”

Lew returned to Nevada, but it was not the same without Orv. Nevada would never be the same. So Lew went back to Wallowa. On his next trip to town, he found a flier tacked to the door of the livery stable. It advertised the Kit Carson Wild Show, which featured both cowboys and Indians. An added attraction was Windmill, a horse that had never been ridden. Any man who rode Windmill would get fifty bucks. Lew was the only volunteer, and he rode the horse with ease. After the show, the manager offered Lew a job. He would be billed as the “World’s Top Bronc Rider,” and fifty bucks would be offered to anyone bringing in a horse that Lew could not ride. Lew took the job and traveled all over the United States. He rode every horse that was brought in.

After a couple of years of one-day stands, Lew left the show in Eureka, Kansas, and then spent several years working in Washington and Canada. In Chesaw, Washington, he was hired by Jack Thorpe to drive a stage sled, which was a stage equipped with sled runners and used in deep snow. But as soon as the snow melted and the weather warmed, Lew returned to Wallowa to look for another bronc-riding job.

There at the drug store he found an ad tacked to a message board. A rodeo was being held that weekend at Grangeville, Idaho. First prize in the saddle bronc contest was a new saddle and twenty-five dollars. The first horse he rode fell, broke its leg, and had to be shot. Lew was given a re-ride and won the contest.

On returning to Wallowa, he signed up for that year’s Pendleton Round-Up (1912). At Pendleton, Lew was made fun of by some of the local cowboys. He was told he was too big, too tall, looked like a clown, and he would never win. After the semi-finals, only three riders had qualified for the final round: Art Acord, who always placed near the top, Bert Kelley, and Lew. Acord drew Speedball; Kelley drew a renowned buckner named Long Tom; and Lew drew Angel, which was rated the top bucking horse. Both Art Acord and Bert Kelley received only satisfactory scores.

When it was Lew’s turn, his left hand reached for the saddle horn while the right hand turned the stirrup out with a quick move, and he pulled himself into the saddle. “He’s up!” roared the crowd. This would be the highlight of the rodeo. The climax they had come to see. Who was the best bronc rider in the world?

Lew didn't disappoint the crowd. Angel appeared to explode in all directions at once. The crowd yelled "LET 'ER BUCK!" The battle between man and horse seemed to last forever. There was no time limit then; you rode until the horse quit bucking.

After twenty seconds, Angel began to lose strength and then finally gave up. Lew was given a standing ovation. The Round-up president gave Lew the Silver Mounted Saddle as the World Champion Bronc Rider.



Lew Minor riding Angel, Pendleton Round-up, 1912

The Wallowa Sun (March 25, 1910)

Davis Sold to McClaran

Valuable Corner Business Block and Stock of Goods Passed to New Ownership Monday

Monday afternoon witnessed the closing of a deal whereby C.A. McClaran, who recently sold his stock in the East Oregon Mercantile Company, secured full ownership and control of the T. L Davis store and property at the corner of First and Pine streets [the current location of Shell's]. The consideration of the deal was not made public, but it was a lump sum and not invoice. Mr. McClaran will take full charge of the store and give it his personal attention as soon as he can close up the affairs of the East Oregon Mercantile Company, which he is assisting to collect. His large experience in the mercantile business and liberal policy, which he exhibited in the firm in which he was formerly a partner, has established his



reputation as a merchant, and he assumes the new store with a full acquaintance and a business advantage that will at once place the store on a progressive basis.

The personal attention which Mr. McClaran will give the store will greatly improve it as Mr. Davis, with his many other interests, could not give his attention fully to the store. J.P. Morelock is assisting Mr. McClaran with the store for the present, and Joe McClaran is assisting.

Mr. Davis will retire from the mercantile business and give his full attention to his blacksmithing, having one of the largest and best equipped shops in Eastern Oregon.

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*As a member you receive three free copies of
historical photographs from our archives, and
10% off your purchase of regional history books.*

Wallowa County Chieftain (October 30, 1947)

George Rogers, ex-sergeant of the Oregon State Police System, was stranded far out in the timber the other day. It seems that George had taken two five-gallon cans out with him in his car. One was full of water and the other contained gasoline. When George found his gas was getting low, he took one of the cans and emptied it in his gas tank. Yup, it was the can full of water. Hunters whom George had befriended in his police days rescued him from his predicament.



George Rogers

Wallowa Record (May 15, 1952)

George Rogers, long time public official in Wallowa County, died Saturday [May 10] at the Wallowa Memorial Hospital, after two sieges of sickness which kept him from his Justice of Peace office in the courthouse for the past month. Funeral services were held at the Community Church in Enterprise on Tuesday afternoon. Mr. Rogers was 75 years of age. Born in Tennessee [in 1877] he came west at the age of 30 and worked for nearly 15 years in sawmills. He was then State Game Warden for Wallowa County for 10 years [1931-1941]. Following that he was on the state police force until his retirement in 1947. Since that time, he has been justice of the peace...As a law enforcement officer Mr. Rogers was zealous and impartial; as justice he was fair-minded and firm, exercising the wisdom garnered in many years of law enforcement work. He was employed by Nibley-Mimnaugh, in Wallowa, before taking up game warden work.

*Thanks to Ron and Celine Gay of Shell Mercantile
for providing the space for the Wallowa History Center.*