

Photo showing early Drummond ranch cattle activity.



Cowboys in Tall Grass

DVD captures stories of area's proud Western heritage

by Ken Greenwood

The concept for a series of documentaries about Oklahoma cowboys was spawned at the time the Nature Conservancy Tallgrass Prairie Preserve was still just an idea. There was considerable resistance to the idea in Osage County. There was a feeling that the Conservancy would be a “stalking horse” for the federal government.

At that time, I was working as development director for the Conservancy, trying to raise \$15 million for the proposed purchase of a part of the storied Chapman Barnard ranch.

We came up with the idea that if we could get a lot of the original Chapman Barnard cowboys back to the ranch for a reunion, we might be able to calm things down. Their approval to the project would be valuable. And so it turned out to be.

Helen Christenson, daughter of Ben Johnson, Sr. and sister of Ben Johnson, Jr. came up with a list of about 90 names of old timers to be invited. More than 80 of these showed up at the ranch for the weekend reunion. While they were available, we videotaped many stories shared of their times on the ranch.

That tape languished for several years until Harvey Payne, director of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, suggested maybe something could be done for the Oklahoma Centennial.

Eventually, we secured the support of Cox Communications, due largely to the help of Vic Bailey, who had graduated from the University of Tulsa.

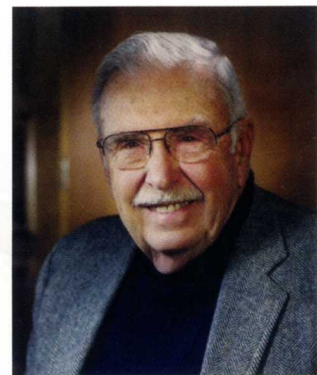
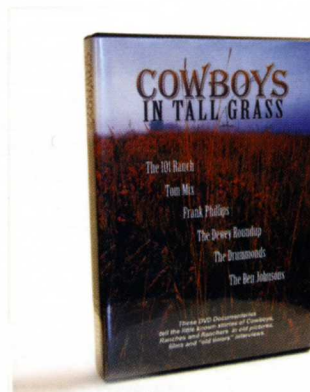
But first, we needed a pilot episode to show underwriters what it would look like. I worked out an agreement with Tim Spurek of Channel 8. He felt he could do it, but would be available only on Saturdays, because he worked five days a week.

Our first filming happened to be on the 101 Ranch in Ponca City because the 101 Ranch Old Timers Association was having its annual weekend meeting.

The reception in Ponca City surprised us. The people were gracious, interested in what we were trying to do and encouraged us to tell the stories of cowboys in tall grass.

Al Ritter, then secretary of the association, turned out to be an excellent interview. Earlier, Harvey Payne had suggested we talk to his father, Holton, who was at the meeting.

Through Al and Holton, we got names of many other people who could tell us the stories of the Miller brothers, Bill Pickett, Henry Grammer, Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson and Buck Jones.



Ken Greenwood helped oversee the “Cowboys in Tall Grass” production.

