

1-2008

Review of Tío Cowboy: Juan Salinas, Rodeo Roper and Horseman.

Thomas A. Britten

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Thomas.Britten@utrgv.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Britten, Thomas A. Review of Tío Cowboy: Juan Salinas, Rodeo Roper and Horseman. *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (2008): 358-359. doi:10.1353/swh.2008.0007.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

of the men tainted the Texas Rangers' image. He also examines Rangers operations by region during these early years, a method that keeps the action well organized. Rangers still rode into action on horses during these years but often called in reinforcements via automobile. The deadly rivalries between such men as Big Bend's Joe Sitter and bandit Chico Cano make for entertaining reading.

Utey then follows the Rangers through the racial riots, prohibition, oil boom, labor unrests, and gangster eras that they encountered over the following decades. He documents the unrest of the 1920s during the gubernatorial run of Ma and Pa Ferguson, when the Rangers' funding and existence was threatened. The reign of succeeding governors is covered as the author expertly shows the effects of politics on the Rangers' reputation.

In 1935, the Rangers combined with the highway patrol in the newly created Department of Public Safety. Struggling through its first years in this role, the Texas Ranger force received able leadership in 1938 when Director Homer Garrison took over, instituting new crime scene processes and training programs that strengthened Ranger effectiveness. Utey details how Garrison's respected leadership transformed the Rangers into a regionally distributed force of professional peace officers who were able to operate with an independence unknown to typical police forces. Occasional gun battles with felons continued to put the Rangers in the national spotlight, but many of the new breed of Rangers served their careers without ever firing their weapons in defense.

The tradition, pride, history, and legend that have shaped the ranging service since the Republic of Texas years created new twentieth-century models of leadership among the captains who adapted their companies to their respective times and places. *Lone Star Lawmen* is an interesting, well-paced study of the Rangers' second century of service that will stand the test of time. Utey's research is extensively documented, and his chapter notes will certainly guide the studies of authors of future studies of the modern Texas Rangers.

Lantana, Texas

STEPHEN L. MOORE

Tío Cowboy: Juan Salinas, Rodeo Roper and Horseman. By Ricardo D. Palacios. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007. Pp. 216. Illustrations, charts, index. ISBN 1585445274. \$22.00, cloth.)

Tío Cowboy chronicles the life and achievements of legendary rancher, calf roper, and professional rodeo performer Juan Light Salinas. The son of a prominent South Texas rancher, Juan Salinas was born in 1901 and learned to ride a horse and to rope cattle during his early childhood. During the 1930s and 1940s, he became one of the first Mexican American cowboys to perform on the professional rodeo circuit. Author Ricardo D. Palacios was Tío Juan's nephew and number one fan. The book is a moving tribute to his uncle, who at one time enjoyed celebrity status in the South Texas Brush Country north of Laredo.

Palacios arranges the book chronologically and relies exclusively on personal reminiscences and anecdotes provided by his famous uncle (consequently there are

no endnotes or bibliography). Salinas was a member of the earliest rodeo cowboy associations (the Cowboys Turtle Association and the Rodeo Cowboys Association). At the height of the Great Depression, he embarked on a career as a professional calf roper on the national rodeo circuit. Salinas's considerable skills (not to mention those of his famous equestrian partners La India and Honey Boy) earned him a place at the Championship Rodeo at Madison Square Garden for ten consecutive years (1936–1946). Exempted from service in World War II because he was a stock raiser, Salinas remained on the rodeo circuit, taking a train to New York City to compete against the best cowboys the nation had to offer. After a successful ten-year career on the circuit (where he earned an average of about \$30,000 a year), he quit performing as a professional but remained active on the local rodeo scene in South Texas.

Palacios's primary objective in writing the book is to shine a light on the larger-than-life personality and career of his Tío Juan. Broader social issues, consequently, are broached only in passing. Salinas attributed a good part of his national prominence to his Hispanic heritage, as people from across the country came to witness a Mexican rodeo cowboy competing for top honors. Although he was the subject of occasional ridicule by racially insensitive fans, Salinas never experienced racism from his fellow rodeo cowboys.

While Juan Salinas's rodeo adventures provide the book's primary focus, Palacios also examines the labor-intensive life of real South Texas cowboys. Readers unfamiliar with the workings of a cattle ranch are in for a real eye-opener when they peruse some of the latter chapters on Texas cattle ranching at mid-century. A person had to be incredibly tough and resilient to eke out a living mending fences, locating strays, doctoring sick animals, and moving cattle from one place to another. Nor were all cowboys the romantic and honorable heroes that one is accustomed to seeing in movies and on television. Some of Tío Juan's own cowpokes were constant headaches who tested his patience and, at times, drifted on the wrong side of the law.

As times passed and Juan Salinas's fame and celebrity status waned, Palacios became convinced that his uncle was deserving of recognition as the first Mexican American rodeo champion. Through hard work and diligence, he succeeded in November 1991 in having his ninety-year-old uncle inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Three years later, LULAC named him to their Latin American International Sports Hall of Fame. While the old cowboy was characteristically modest about such recognition, they were fitting tributes, Palacios argues, "to the greatest Mexican cowboy who ever lived" (p. 185).

University of Texas at Brownsville

THOMAS A. BRITTEN

River Walk: The Epic Story of San Antonio's River. By Lewis F. Fisher. (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2006. Pp. 184. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1893271401. \$36.95, cloth.)

If careful readers can disagree on a book's topic, that often signals a botched communication job. Not here. Lewis Fisher, longtime chronicler of San Antonio's natural and cultural heritage, offers such a wonderfully comprehensive report on the river that it almost becomes an encyclopedia in narrative form. The way Goodman's