

Roping's Roots

Cowboy Park: Steer-Roping Contests on the Border

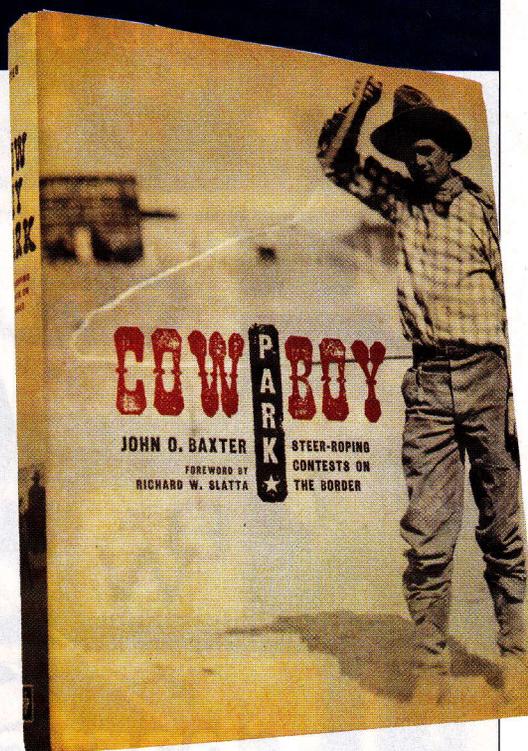
By John O. Baxter

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In the early 1900s, laws banning steer-roping competitions were passed in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. Proponents for the ban cited unnecessary harm to the animals, while fans of the supremely popular sport called foul. *Cowboy Park* chronicles this little-known historical sidenote by focusing on a south-of-the-border venue that served as a speakeasy of sorts for Southwestern cowboys looking to keep their roping skills sharp during the sport's prohibition era.

Looking at the ban against steer-roping as an opportunity, Nat Greer and his son, Tom, headed across the Rio Grande from El Paso in 1907 and started Cowboy Park in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. There, cowboys practiced and competed in steer-roping and other rodeo events, and spectators hungry for competition crossed the border to watch. Many of the cowboys from Cowboy Park went on to take top prizes in steer-roping at the Calgary Stampede in 1912, as well as at competitions in Cheyenne and Oklahoma.

Beginning with a background history of



rodeo, the author explains the early ban on steer-roping competitions, then details the financial ups and downs, venue changes, and the eventual disastrous effects of the Mexican Revolution on Cowboy Park.

Drawing largely from newspaper articles, Baxter tells this cowboy tale through competition results and the colorful commentary of the journalists of the day. Although detailed event results bog down the narrative at times, there's plenty here to delight rodeo fans and history buffs alike. —Nicholas LoVerde