

A Wilder West

Rodeo in Western Canada

Mary-Ellen Kelm



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Acknowledgments

This project began on a hot day in May 1993 as I travelled north to take part in the founding of what was then Canada's first new university in a generation – the University of Northern British Columbia. Driving out of the Fraser Canyon, with my two cats in a small crate on the seat next to me, I passed through small towns and reserves along Highway 97. As I entered towns such as Clinton and Williams Lake, and reserves such as Bonaparte and Soda Creek, I started noticing signs for upcoming rodeos. I grew up in Windsor, Ontario, so I knew nothing about rodeos. My dad, a native Californian born and raised in Visalia, had once taken me to a travelling rodeo that came to the Windsor Stockcar Racetrack. A typical teenager, I was unimpressed. Now it seemed to me, on that day in 1993, I was in real cowboy country. But what did that mean in this very Canadian West?

Answering that question has taken some considerable time. A seed grant from the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) and a standard research grant in 2000 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded the work. A team of research assistants at both UNBC and Simon Fraser University (SFU) gathered piles and piles of newspaper clippings, rodeo programs, and photographs, and conducted some of the interviews. So I wish to thank Dan Watt, Rhys Pugh, Mark Sarrazin, Lorna Townsend, Greg Sell, Sarah Carr-Locke, Megan Prins, Kathy McKay, and Corinne George. Staff at a great many archives large and small have also generously given of their time, especially Jim Bowman of the Glenbow Museum Archives, Diana French of the Rodeo and Ranching Museum at Williams Lake, the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat, the Galt Museum and Archives in Lethbridge, the Museum of the Highwood in High River, the Kamloops Museum and Archives, the Secwepemc Heritage Centre Archives, the Dawson Creek Archives, the Oliver and District Heritage Society, the Surrey Archives, the Vancouver Archives, the Provincial Archives of Alberta, the British Columbia Archives, and

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Introduction

Riders were warming up their horses when I arrived at the Whispering Pines Reserve, near Kamloops, British Columbia, for the National Aboriginal Achievement Day rodeo that clear, hot morning in June 2004. The contestants were both settlers and Aboriginal people, defined here as First Nations, Métis, and mixed-heritage people, local men and women from ranches, reserves, and small towns.¹ Singly and in groups of two, they walked their horses in wide circles in the outdoor arena. As they did they talked, catching up on news and gossip, asking more serious questions of each other: How close had the fires of the previous summer come to their property? Had they lost buildings, rangeland, or stock?² As they moved their horses into a trot, the conversations continued, groups split apart, and new ones formed. Circles widened as the horses began to canter. Riders peeled off on their own to work with their horses, reminding the horses of the specific skills they would need that day: the abrupt halt of the calf-roping horse, the sudden burst of speed required for steer wrestling. (A glossary at the end of this book provides definitions of rodeo events and terms.) As they began to cool down their horses, the riders grouped again, joking, challenging each other, until it was time to leave the arena and prepare for the day's events. Such fleeting encounters, moments when camaraderie challenges the differences and antipathies created by racialization and gender, are at the heart of this book.

Such ephemeral moments as these are not easy to find in the historical record. Nearly twenty years ago, Richard White encouraged us to seek them out, to go beyond histories of the West that depict Aboriginal people and settlers as either attracting or repelling each other.³ Rodeo may seem a poor topic in which to search for more nuanced views. Some historians have dismissed popular culture, like rodeos, as an “extension of capitalist manipulation of the West as an icon of individualism ... a ‘twilight zone’ of myth and denial.”⁴ Like much of the culture of the West, they contend, rodeo celebrated what Richard Slotkin called the myth of the frontier,

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which grounded American national identity in conquest of Aboriginal peoples and nature, and provided the justification for American power internationally. Rodeo acted out these ideas and in so doing supported white male dominance – or so the standard academic interpretation has gone. Canadian and American scholars have found this interpretation compelling at least in part because, like cowboying itself, rodeo has a hemispheric history: American immigrants brought the sport, and its values, to Canada in the early twentieth century, and Canadians have adapted the standard scripts to their own purposes.⁵ Rodeo truly is a transnational topic, and thought of in the broadest terms, it does seem to do little more than glorify conquest.

But focusing on the big transnational picture denies careful attention to the details in which the everyday interactions in the rodeo arena, and in the more extended celebrations that became known as stampedes (see glossary), challenged and modified the standard storyline of conquest. So this book strikes a balance between this broader history and micro-histories of rodeo in small towns and rural and Aboriginal communities in three regions of Western Canada: southern Alberta; the BC Interior, located between the eastern slopes of the Coastal Range and the western slopes of the Rockies; and the Peace River country, east of the Rockies in northern BC and Alberta. All these regions are historical ranching districts, though many communities that eventually staged rodeos had moved on to other economic modes, mainly grain farming or fruit growing, by the twentieth century when the bulk of our story takes place. Many shared commonalities, not just between themselves but also with other groups of people who embraced rodeo across the transborder West. They shared an attraction to the myth of the frontier, lauding early pioneers dubbed “old-timers” and celebrating the pacification of Aboriginal people, though in Canada this was more often conceived as a process of benevolent containment rather than conquest, a distinction few Aboriginal people care much about. But there were important variations too. For example, Alberta’s First Nations used stampedes to remind settlers and governments of their treaty rights, whereas Aboriginal people in BC, with a few exceptions, had no treaties. Government officials laid out reserves in Alberta of a size intended to render the First Nations there self-sufficient; in British Columbia, reserve size was kept small in order to force residents into wage labour, ensuring that BC ranches would rely, for many years, on Aboriginal



MAP 1 The regions discussed in this book.

workers. The specific social relations of a particular setting shaped what went on at a rodeo even while the broader transborder history of the event encouraged consistent forms and structures to develop over time. This book attends to both the general patterns of that history and how those patterns played out in small communities in Western Canada.

By the early twentieth century, rodeos had developed a predictable set of contests, and what follows is a generalized overview of rodeo events as they existed in the 1930s. Bucking horse, steer, and bull riding, known as the roughstock events, tested the agility and toughness of both rider and mount. Calf roping, steer wrestling, and the other timed events demonstrated the teamwork of horse and rider. In this way, rodeos played and replayed, often dozens of times in a single rodeo, the relationships between humans and animals inherent to ranching life. Parades, grandstand events, and historical re-enactments all taught spectators about the progression of the West into modernity. And yet, even these recurrent stagings, these endless repetitions, could not foreclose the possibility that things might get out of hand. That possibility is what put the wild in the Wild West Show.

Still, by the 1930s, people expected that rodeos would have certain features. A parade announced the beginning of festivities. For travelling performances, such as Wild West Shows and circuses, the parade was a form of advertising: it tempted onlookers with a glimpse of the exciting sights and dramatic features awaiting them. Rodeo built on this tradition, as famous cowboys and cowgirls rode through town exhibiting feats of riding or roping. Since many small towns and rural enclaves were not always secure settlements, rodeos and their parades offered a chance for communities to demonstrate orderly stability and to perform historical narratives that might convey legitimacy.⁶ Much like the early nineteenth-century parades in American cities in which the desired social order was envisioned, rodeo parades told a certain kind of story.⁷ Aboriginal people often led them, demonstrating their indigeneity and, in the minds of organizers, their pre-modern place in an unfolding history of settlement. Then came the cowboys and cowgirls, dressed, in the early part of the century, in woolly chaps, brightly coloured shirts, and high-crowned hats. They represented open-range ranching, considered at the time to be a rudimentary form of settlement. Then came the floats organized and constructed by local clubs, farmers and town-dwellers, businesses and churches, all a testament to the productivity, the success, the civilized



Tsuu T'ina people on parade in Lethbridge, 1910s. *Glenbow Museum Archives, NA-1105-78*

modernity of the place. Intermingled throughout were marching bands, demonstrating discipline and unity, hallmarks of rational masculinity.⁸

The grand entry brought organizers, civic elites, honoured guests, cowboys, and Aboriginal people into the arena. Bands played national anthems, and a minister prayed, opening the rodeo with a reminder that God granted man dominion over the animals. A master of ceremonies, usually a local community leader but sometimes a celebrity from out of town, mounted the stage and introduced that year's rodeo queen and her entourage. Sometimes, local rodeo cowboys who had died during the past year were honoured in the opening ceremonies.

As they waited for the rodeo to begin, spectators could peruse their programs. Here too the story of conquest was often repeated. Programs recounted town histories and regaled readers with investment opportunities in the region. Advertisements from local businesses competed to attract visitors. The programs explained the various events, often linking them to the working life of the cowboy but also elucidating the rules and procedures of what increasingly became sporting events rather than exhibitions of cowboy skills. Rodeo programs included ethnographic tidbits about local First Nations, especially if the stampede also included an Indian village, as it did at Fort Macleod, Alberta, and Williams Lake,

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BC, in the early twentieth century. The schedule often featured cowboy and cowgirl events, and “Indian” and “squaw” races as they were called – competitions in which contestants vied within their own gendered and racialized categories. Finally, programs included a dictionary of terms, offering visitors access to the world of rodeo by teaching them its specialized language. All of this – the parade, the program, and the schedule of events – seemed to constitute a kind of ritual in which the values and the social structures of the North American West were displayed and where settler hegemony was legitimized.

Then the contests began. In some of the signature rodeo events, such as bronc riding and calf roping, men and women, Aboriginal people and settlers all competed against each other. Here the careful staging of rodeos as masculinist celebrations of settlement encountered the unpredictable. Rodeo parades and programs extolled settler ascendancy, but the contests themselves could lead to other outcomes. As Peter Iverson and others have shown, Aboriginal men were expert riders and ropers, and they took their share of prize money, becoming local, and eventually international, rodeo heroes. Both settler and Aboriginal women proved their courage and skill in riding roughstock or standing astride two horses hurtling down the track in Roman racing at early twentieth-century stampedes.⁹ Even the animals stood a chance of winning. Horses could buck off their riders; calves might escape the rope.¹⁰ Cowboys and cowgirls sometimes lost their lives in the ring. By midcentury, rodeo became somewhat less chaotic as managers and cowboys crafted new rules and standards, but it was not worth watching if the outcome were guaranteed. Rodeo was about risk – including the risk that events would challenge dominant narratives about settler ascendancy. In this sense, it was always wilder than a study of its forms and structures would suggest.

Similarly, there were moments of encounter outside the arena that went beyond local stampede scripts. These are harder to document, for often they exist only in photographs and reminiscences. In British Columbia, where Aboriginal men were a significant part of the ranching workforce, they also shared leisure time with settler cowboys. In some cases, the emerging elites of BC’s early twentieth-century rodeos, men such as the Similkameen Valley’s Harry Shuttleworth, were mixed-heritage offspring of unions between ranchers and Aboriginal women, and as such, they could not be neatly categorized as either “cowboy” or “Indian.” Rodeo in BC, then, was an expression as much of hybridity as of settler hegemony.

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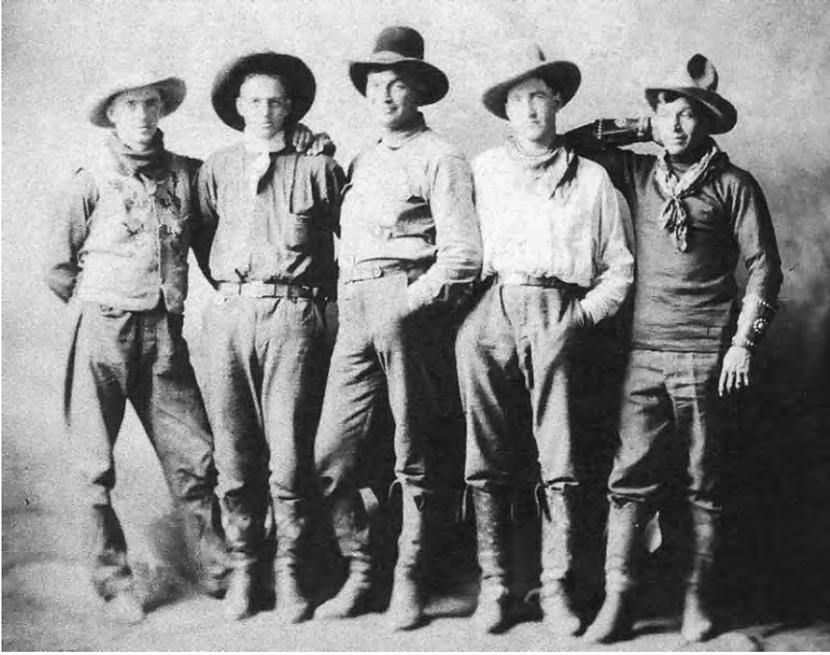


Tillie Baldwin (right) in the Roman race, Winnipeg Stampede, 1913. *Glenbow Museum Archives, NA-1029-18*

In Alberta, rodeo emerged in the often underappreciated alliances between reserve communities and small towns against more powerful entities such as the federal government or big-city media. Organizers fought government prohibitions on Aboriginal attendance at small-town rodeos. When Calgary papers pilloried Kainai bronc-rider Tom Three Persons in 1912, the town elites of Fort Macleod, Alberta, came to his defence, demanding a retraction. Rodeo visitors, many of whom were tourists, had their first encounters with Aboriginal people in the Indian encampments at small-town stampedes, purchasing beadwork and paying to take photographs. And Aboriginal people used these moments of encounter to raise awareness of their cultures, their histories, and their current concerns. In Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, Mike Mountain Horse found in stampede-goers an audience for his writing on contemporary Kainai issues. Finally, a shared interest in the sport brought settler spectators to reserve rodeos across southern Alberta and in the BC Interior. Both the in-arena encounters between Aboriginal people and settlers, and those that occurred in the Indian villages, the grandstands, the midways, and the food concessions, suggest that seeing rodeo only as an institution of settler hegemony, as scholars such as Elizabeth Furniss and Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence have done, misses some important points.

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Left to right: Garney Willis, Cyclone Smith, Hans Richter, Herb Matier, and Harry Shuttleworth, winners of the 1926 Sumas, Washington, Rodeo. The five BC cowboys were reputed to have won all the money that year and had this photo printed as a postcard. Although all five friends hailed from BC at the time, Smith and Matier were originally from the US. British Columbia Cowboy Heritage Society

The first of these is that rodeo was a place of encounter, or to borrow Mary Louise Pratt's useful concept, a "contact zone." Pratt coined the term to impart a sense of the unpredictable and the chaotic, that which slips beyond controlling impulses of organization and discourse, when peoples interacted with one another. Certainly rodeos, as suggested above, were heavily structured both materially and discursively, but they were never fully contained by those formations. Thinking about rodeo as a contact zone allows us to fully explore those extraneous, surprising, subverting strands without ignoring the larger socio-economic, political, and cultural arrangements in which it was staged and to which it contributed.¹¹

Rodeos, as we will see, were contact zones precisely because they were venues at which the improvisational coexisted with the staged, where hybridity rubbed shoulders with racial and gendered segmentation, and where colonial power infused events but did not overdetermine how

people would behave or indeed how they would ascribe meaning to what they saw or experienced. Moreover, as James Clifford reminds us, “contact approaches presuppose not sociocultural wholes subsequently brought into relationship, but rather systems already constituted relationally, entering new relations through historical processes of displacement.”¹² Rodeo contributed to those “new relations,” created histories, built communities, and crafted new identities as both settlers and First Nations grappled with modernity, in varying ways and with varying levels of control and intensity.

Accordingly, it was a site of struggle for both settler and Aboriginal communities, and this is my second point. The growth of the sport over the last century tends to obscure the fact that some small towns in British Columbia and Alberta were quite ambivalent about staging rodeos. Whereas some, such as Raymond, Alberta, and Williams Lake, BC, embraced it from the outset, Medicine Hat and Kamloops wondered if it were worth the expense. Some, such as Lethbridge, worried that it brought Aboriginal people to town and into contact with unscrupulous whites; others found that stampedes were not money-makers unless Aboriginal people attended. The federal government was certainly opposed to Aboriginal people going to stampedes, especially if that meant dressing in traditional clothing and performing outlawed dances. Indeed, the Department of Indian Affairs under Duncan Campbell Scott amended the Indian Act in 1914 precisely to prohibit such attendance, putting government in conflict with settlers as well as First Nations. For their part, Aboriginal people were not united on the value of rodeos. Aboriginal youth in southern Alberta eagerly attended them, and elders worried that this distracted them from the spiritual gatherings of the spring and summer, particularly the sun dance. Like other celebrations, rodeo brought division as well as commonality to the surface, multiple perspectives that are lost in an interpretation that finds only settler dominance in its effects. In the sense that rodeo was not entirely predictable, it was wilder than anyone planned, and it reflected a wilder history of relationships between Aboriginal people and settlers.

Further, rodeos did not simply reflect communities – they actively constituted them in particular ways, and this is the third argument put forward in this book. For small towns and rural communities, rodeo helped pay the bills of less financially viable events such as fairs and exhibitions. As rodeo became a sport, it required purpose-built facilities, and committees

ran fundraising campaigns that resulted in new arenas, racetracks, and grandstands in small towns and rural communities across the West. When Tommy Wilde and Jack Lawless staged their rodeos at Taylor Flats in the Peace River country at the end of the Second World War, they built the region's first dance hall, illuminated by strings of electric lights. In First Nations today, rodeo provides the focus for infrastructural renewal. At Whispering Pines, near Kamloops, the arena is one venue in a larger recreational park that also includes a motocross course. Rodeos, then, provided the focus for efforts to build structures that often had multiple uses and that contributed to the leisure opportunities for rural people.

They constituted community in more subtle ways as well. Much like the exhibitions and pageants studied by Elsbeth Heaman and H.V. Nelles, rodeo did more than reflect community values; communities came to define themselves by the values they thought rodeo expressed.¹³ Organizers encouraged volunteer labour by calling on local men and women to live up to the mythic standards of pioneer voluntarism and hospitality. The *High River Times* reminded townsfolk of the cooperative spirit of the pioneer generation when it asked them to help build the chutes and corrals necessary for the High River Rodeo of 1946. The 1950 rodeo committee at Kamloops encouraged women to open their homes to visitors just as their foremothers had done in the early years of settlement. Swinging a hammer, accommodating a visitor, or donating a trophy thus gave the people of small-town Alberta and BC a chance to demonstrate that they were the true descendants of the much-lauded pioneer generation. Just as the Canadian West became increasingly modern, with better roads and communication networks, the development of megaprojects, and economic diversification, small towns such as High River and Williams Lake sought out and celebrated surviving old-timers, defined as settlers from the first or second generation of settlement. Lauding their "pioneer history" became one of the selling points of small-town stampedes, and in the process, they commodified that history as heritage to be consumed by tourists and locals alike.¹⁴ The focus on old-timers, moreover, highlighted whiteness – defined, demonstrated, and feted it – as the keystone to heritage in Western Canada. In this, the small towns of BC and Alberta linked themselves to the broader mythic constructions of the transborder West, with all the legitimacy and internal ambivalence that entailed.¹⁵

All participants could use rodeo to define and display identity. Even in the early decades of the twentieth century, when Aboriginal people seldom



Welcoming Princess Margaret to Secwepemc land at the Williams Lake Stampede, 1958. *Courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives, H-05839*

controlled the staging of public celebrations, they used them to communicate directly to visiting dignitaries about their concerns over treaty rights (or lack of treaties) and access to land and resources. Riding in parades, setting up Indian villages, or dancing before dignitaries forcefully demonstrated to both spectators and Aboriginal people themselves that they were not just remnants of the past but very much had a place in a modernizing Canada, combining old and new cultural expressions to exhibit that fact.¹⁶ They also rode to express pride in themselves. As one elder described his participation in the 1958 Williams Lake Stampede held in honour of Princess Margaret's BC visit, "we showed her and the people of Canada that we have royalty too."¹⁷ Aboriginal involvement in settler and reserve rodeos at the turn of the twenty-first century retained its political edge while honouring elders and families of First Nations communities. Dakelh (Carrier) families took their place in the 2001 Anahim Lake Stampede parade, and at the 2002 Nemiah Stampede on the Chilcotin Plateau, announcers honoured the "great Tsilhqot'in warriors" of the past, personified that day by the riders assembled for the

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mountain race. Such displays point to a long history of occupation of the land, of cultural persistence and adaptation, and of families and masculinities emergent despite all government attempts to destroy aboriginality throughout the twentieth century. Simultaneously, they are both cultural production and political activism.¹⁸

Moreover, rodeos have become deeply embedded in some First Nations' sense of themselves. "It's part of our tradition: horses and rodeo," declares the narrator of one documentary film. The ways in which Aboriginal people have incorporated rodeo as part of both specific (Kainai, for example) and broadly defined Aboriginal culture constitute a process that neither escaped nor was completely bounded by colonial legacies of exoticism and commodification.¹⁹ Scholars agree that the relationship between communities, memories, cultural production, and commemoration is a negotiated one that must cope with ambivalence and divergent epistemologies of the past. Aboriginal engagements with rodeo are no exception. Just as public celebrations contained change, ambivalence, and multiple perspectives in settler societies, so too did Aboriginal performances emerge from division as well as agreement.²⁰ Rodeo engaged with old rivalries in southern Alberta between the Cree at Hobbema, the Nakoda at Morley, and the Kainai at Standoff as well as among signatories of Treaty 7.²¹ At the same time, it fed into emerging pan-Indian definitions of aboriginality by contributing images such as the Indian cowboy of Buffy Sainte-Marie's song "He's an Indian Cowboy at the Rodeo," written, in her words, "to celebrate the beauty of Indian reality."²² What is important to remember, in all of this, is not that some version of authenticity was either staged or negated, a tradition invented or commodified, but rather that new authenticities, identities, and relationships arose in the contact zone where audiences and performers interacted, as Julie Cruikshank has so persuasively argued.²³ In the late twentieth century, in the context of monumental land-claim litigation, new treaty negotiations, and intensifying Aboriginal protest, cultural performance and interaction bear considerable political weight. Therefore, *A Wilder West* offers new perspectives on the history of Aboriginal activism, demonstrating the palpable linkages between cultural display and political action.²⁴

Rodeo also formed a community where none had existed before: specifically, that of the "on the road" professional cowboy. As rodeo's popularity grew in the 1920s, circuits developed across the transborder West. As contestants and their families travelled together, a new community

developed. A sense of common cause grew, and by the 1930s and 1940s, rodeo cowboy organizations emerged – the Cowboys’ Turtle Association in the United States, which was eventually renamed the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), and in Canada the Cowboys’ Protective Association, which was renamed the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association (CPRA). In Canada, the CPRA recognized the importance of Aboriginal cowboys by setting aside two “Indian representative” positions on its executive. More importantly, Aboriginal communities across BC and Alberta produced elite rodeo cowboys such as Kenny McLean, Fred Gladstone, and Dave Perry. During the 1950s and 1960s, the on-the-road community of professional cowboys to which they belonged became a kind of liminal contact zone in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people lived and worked together. As the CPRA developed its rules and standards of conduct, it quite deliberately avoided defining “The Rodeo Cowboy” as white. Its official rhetoric and the testimonies of pro rodeo cowboys all downplayed racialization in favour of a professional identity highlighting masculinities and grounded in the right to make a living at rodeo, the responsibility to behave in ways that put rodeo in a good light before the media and the public, in an emphasis on rodeo as a family sport, and in precepts of fair play and open competition. In this way, rodeo joined other sports in reflecting and constituting masculinities, emerging and varying, over the course of the twentieth century.²⁵ It was this community that so intrigued Clifford Westermeier, rodeo’s first historian, who wrote in the 1940s; subsequent historians, such as Kristine Fredriksson and Michael Allen, have focused on the rise of professional rodeo and the ways in which the rodeo cowboy, as a particular image of masculinity, resonates with American culture. Only Max Foran has questioned how and why Western Canadians embraced the sport.²⁶

At first, the definition of the rodeo cowboy did not include women. Though women had performed and competed at rodeos early in the twentieth century, the rise of professional organizations and pro rodeo sidelined them for two decades, until they too formed their own association. Established in 1957, the Canadian Barrel Racing Association worked hard to win acceptance for female participation in rodeos staged in Western Canada. Women too deployed the rhetoric of the pro cowboy community, depicting themselves as members of the rodeo family. They did not challenge the dominant values of the sport, even those that lauded masculinity. Though their efforts to demand re-entry coincided with

women's movements of the late twentieth century, few cowgirls reported an affinity with feminism. The women who demanded space at rodeos in small Canadian towns did so from within a community that defined femininity as including both competence around horses and stock and the mental, emotional, and physical toughness required to flourish in the pro rodeo world. The travelling rodeo community emerged in the second half of the twentieth century with its own processes of forming racialized and gendered categories.

Rodeo constituted community in one further way. Because not all Aboriginal people had access to the pro community or found it congenial, several Aboriginal rodeo organizations developed, as did a circuit of reserve rodeos. Here too they developed their own definition of the rodeo cowboy, one that emphasized a commitment to acting as role models for young men and women in their communities. Rather than simply reflecting pre-existing social groupings and their values, rodeo represented a set of overlapping communities in which individuals found a sense of belonging and self-definition. This surplus of meanings is exemplified by people such as Joan (Palmantier) Gentles of Williams Lake, who, as a Tsilhqot'in woman, former rodeo queen, barrel-racer, and CPRA-approved judge, belonged in several of these communities simultaneously.

Throughout, this book attends to discourses of difference and the pathways used by individuals and communities to navigate within and around them. We know from the "new" imperial history that difference was produced not just through law or spatial segregation but through the regulation of sex, through domesticity, and through exhibition and performance.²⁷ The scholars who have focused on rodeo as ritual make plain that it produced binaries, such as cowboy and Indian, that were grounded in popular perceptions of history, race, and gender. Equally important to historical cartographies of difference is the scholarship that marks out thresholds that opened racialized boundaries. As Louis B. Warren has shown for the Wild West Show, friendships, rivalries, fleeting love affairs, and lifelong marriages developed when the many cultures of the American West found themselves living and travelling together.²⁸ Yet emotions that strayed across racialized lines could come with a cost. Intimacy offered opportunities, but it also exposed the recesses of human lives to colonial surveillance, division, and disapprobation. Indeed, as Ann Laura Stoler has reminded historians, the racial taxonomies of colonialism were not

solely rational but affective as well. And just as sexual desire could lead to transgression, so too could other emotions, such as parental and filial love in mixed-heritage families. Friendships and collaborations that crossed racialized lines could be equally challenging.²⁹ Assimilation's putative success stories – missionary converts, educated colonial subjects, even, perhaps, Indian cowboys – offered object lessons in the *impermanence* of difference.³⁰ As Nicholas Thomas writes, “the products of assimilation were taken to be subversive as often as they attested to the successes of civilizing missions.”³¹ For “mimic men,” to use Homi Bhabha's term, demonstrated the very artificiality of the colonial project, its ambivalence, and in so doing, undercut its authority.³² So this book seeks out both difference and ambivalence, building on a burgeoning scholarship that closely examines the subtle nuances in specific relationships and local dynamics in small towns, rural communities, and reserves in Western Canada.³³

Attention to the “microphysics of daily lives,” to use Stoler's phrase, brings new sources and new methods to the fore that read “for discrepant tone, tacit knowledge, stray emotions, extravagant details, ‘minor’ events” and highlight the ephemeral moments such as those observed at the Whispering Pines Rodeo.³⁴ As Richard Slatta suggested years ago, studying cowboy culture requires the use of a variety of sources.³⁵ This book is based on just such an array. The records of the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association were the largest archival collection, but organizational and administrative records existed for a few rodeos as well. Most were run on a shoestring budget by a handful of volunteers, and their records, when they exist, are in basements, barns, and garages. Newspaper coverage helped set rodeos into the context of small-town, rural, and reserve life, reported on the work of rodeo committees, and offered glimpses of how they responded to rodeos. Given the “boosterism” of much Western Canadian press, I tried, wherever possible, to triangulate its accounts with autobiographies and oral histories. The proliferation of small presses in British Columbia that foster local histories has meant that people from Dog Creek to Dawson Creek have published their own accounts. The Glenbow Museum in Alberta and the various oral history projects of the BC Archives produced thousands of hours of testimony from Aboriginal people and from settlers speaking of life in early twentieth-century Western Canada. The Dorothy Calverley Collection of the South

Peace Archives covers life in the Peace River country. Placing announcements on CBC Radio and in local newspapers introduced me to a delightful assortment of cowboys and cowgirls, stock contractors, and rodeo promoters who agreed to talk with me about their experiences. Finally, the records of the Department of Indian Affairs and police and court accounts rounded out the sources used to research this book. With their intriguing contradictions and loose ends, they called out for interpretations that would give full play to the “wildness” and the surprising social relations that emerged at rodeos in the Canadian West.

As this book explores rodeo as a contact zone, it does not deny the structures of rodeo, the regional forces of colonization, the specific local mappings of difference that settlers and First Nations constructed and with which they contended when they met at a rodeo. But it also wishes to explore other affective relationships – family ties, friendships and rivalries, professional identities, and associations – that crossed or re-affirmed racialized, gendered, and classed lines. And so this book begins in the next chapter with a history of rodeo as it developed in small towns, rural communities, and reserves in southern Alberta and the BC Interior. As small-town elites worked to advertise their districts, competing for settlers and investment, they turned to rodeos and stampedes to attract attention. Here visitors and residents could take pride in the modernity of their settlements while they praised the past, embodied by both “cowboys and Indians” who were placed in competitions that were segmented by race and gender. Yet even as they celebrated settlement, they honoured a more mixed past when, as the Pincher Creek organizing committee put it, “Indians were very much a part of the scene.”³⁶ Moreover, organizers did not fully enforce the rules that separated cowboys from Indians, so Aboriginal cowboys emerged as an integral part of rodeo history. Federal government attempts to keep Aboriginal people away from these festivities constituted a particular point of conflict between settlers and Ottawa. Government restrictions nearly curtailed stampede organizing in Alberta during the 1910s, but the persistent pressure of both settlers and First Nations effectively circumvented them. Aboriginal people, for the most part, incorporated southern Alberta and BC Interior rodeos into annual seasonal economic, cultural, and spiritual rounds. They organized rodeos themselves on reserves, and rodeo cowboys embodied new articulations of Aboriginal masculinity. Stampedes at Fort Macleod in the 1920s, for example, became an opportunity for Aboriginal leaders from across the

region to meet and discuss common concerns, and to involve settler supporters in their efforts. Although the intended message of southern Alberta rodeos was one of settler dominance, a much more mixed experience was available to those who attended them. Men and women, Aboriginal people and settlers also interacted at rodeos in British Columbia and, especially for women, with much greater latitude. In these ways, rodeo quite clearly was a significant contact zone for settlers and Aboriginal people, men and women.

Chapter 2 explores the idea that rodeo as a contact zone shaped subjects as well as structures by examining the role it played in crafting identities, affinities, and relationships in and between rural and reserve communities, settlers, and Aboriginal people. In particular, this chapter tracks the masculinities and femininities associated with rodeo and the specific and overlapping influences of regional contexts and of the conditions of settlement and colonization. As increasing numbers of small centres in Alberta and British Columbia staged rodeos, the cowboy became a popular icon of self-sufficiency in the desperate Depression years. In BC, provincial-government-assisted settlement schemes put people on the land in more and more isolated places, and they found that community festivities, such as rodeos, made life more bearable.

By the end of the 1920s, a rodeo circuit, which is the focus of Chapter 3, spanned Alberta and BC and crossed the border into the United States. Greater divisions along racialized, classed, and gendered lines appeared. The pressure of Indian Agents and the costs of riding the large trans-border circuits excluded many Aboriginal cowboys. Women too found themselves sidelined as, by the 1930s, organizers began to eliminate their events at the larger shows, bringing in women mainly as paid-per-ride performers. Meanwhile, the settler cowboys who rode the circuit started to see themselves as a community, formed associations, and began to craft for themselves a new normative category of masculinity – the professional rodeo cowboy.

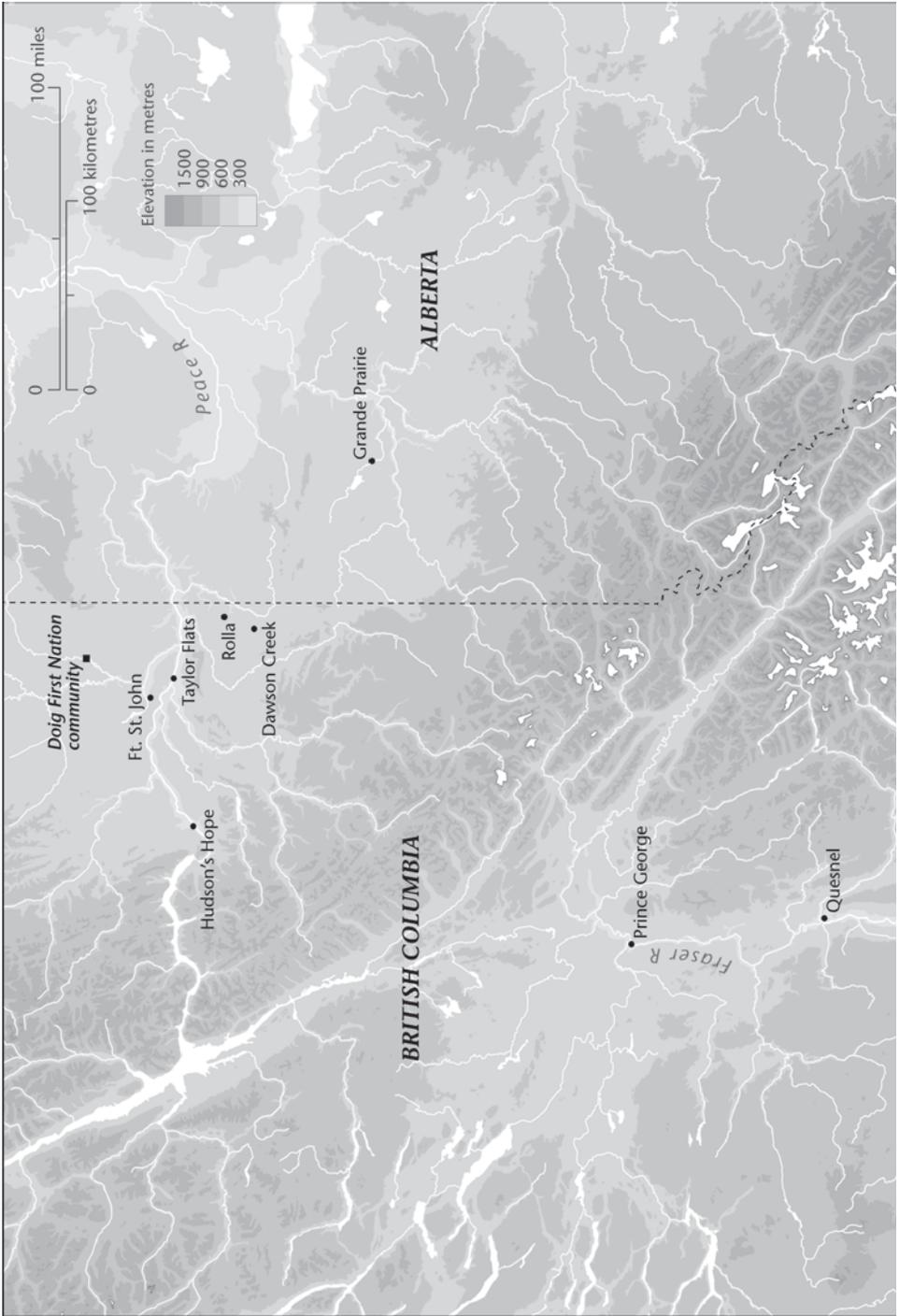
The next chapter examines the growth of the Canadian pro rodeo community as it materialized after the Second World War. Organized as the Cowboys' Protective Association (which was later renamed the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association), members worked together to standardize rodeos, to increase the winnings so that individuals could make a living at the sport, and to improve the public image of rodeo cowboys. To this end, the CPRA devised and enforced a code of conduct

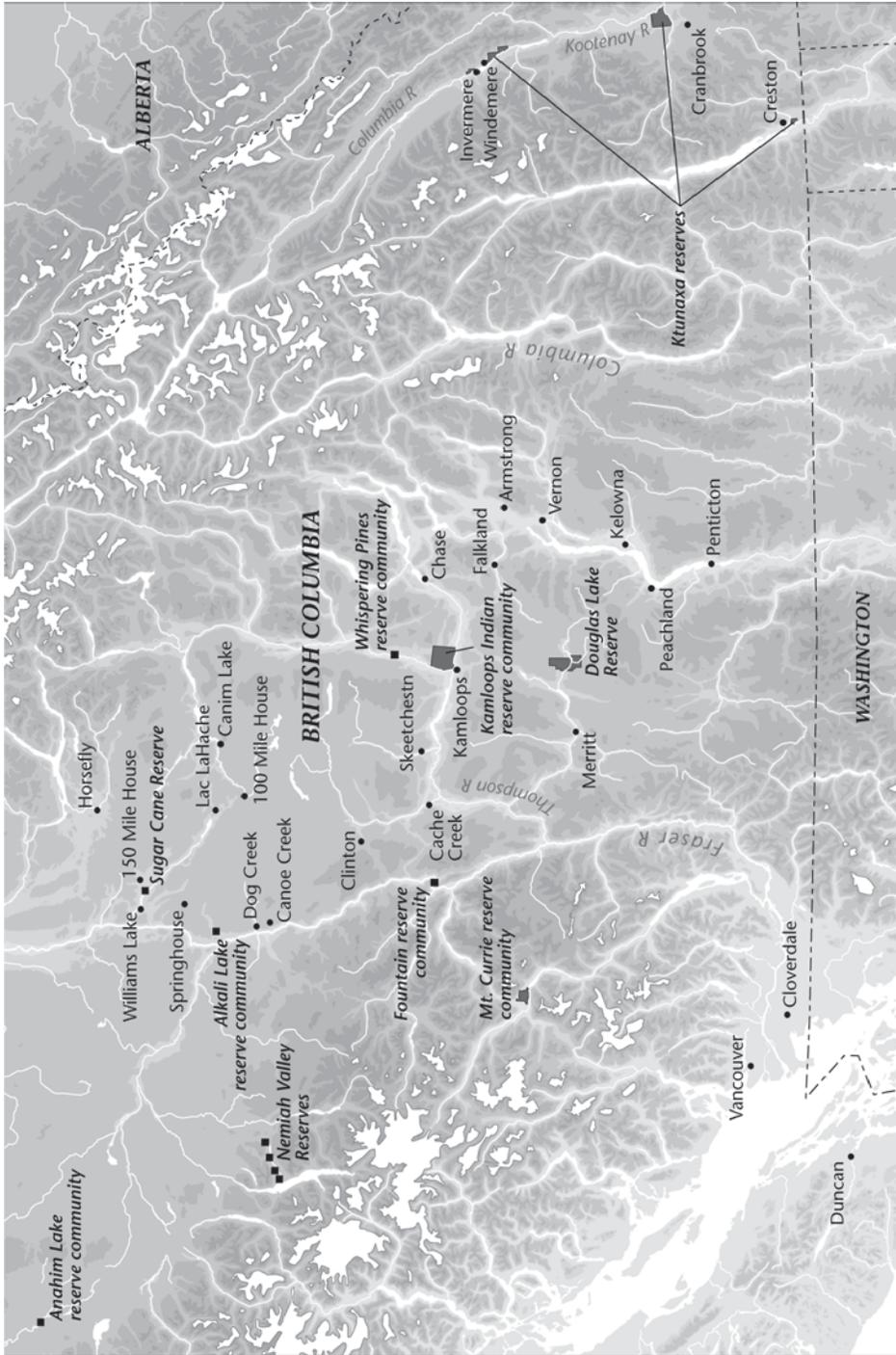
that sought to make the cowboys respectable. Fitting in with the masculinities that developed during the Cold War, the cowboys were tough, not averse to physical risk but rational and responsible, as evidenced by their participation in a CPRA insurance plan that would help defray medical and funeral costs should they be injured or killed in the arena. The CPRA set out to portray them as respectable family men, willing and capable of paying their bills, knowledgeable (not sentimental) protectors of animals. The CPRA held places on its executive for Aboriginal men, but women struggled to re-enter the sport after the Second World War. Still, as families, both Aboriginal and settler travelled the pro circuit together, where they became a kind of liminal contact zone.

Chapter 5 then traces the effects of professionalization on small-town rodeos. As before the war, local organizers relied on nearby residents, both settler and Aboriginal, to do the work of staging a rodeo. But it was increasingly difficult to make money at these events, for professional rodeos, with their guaranteed prize money for riders and guaranteed entry fees for organizers, competed with small-scale ventures. So, many small towns from Cremona, Alberta, to Williams Lake, BC, agreed to put on CPRA-sanctioned rodeos. This meant higher entry fees and fewer events but assured numbers of travelling professional cowboys. The immediate effect was to eliminate many local competitors from the main events. And yet, as a sport, rodeo did not have a large following in many quarters. Thus, small-town organizers scrambled to add “local” features: some of these, such as barrel racing, were particular to women, and others, such as tipi villages, to Aboriginal people, repeating the gendered and racialized segmentation of previous decades. Although it was still possible, of course, for a professional Aboriginal cowboy to enter and win the pro competitions, the signature events became largely associated with white cowboys, whereas the amateur contests such as the Williams Lake mountain race became connected with local and Aboriginal men. For many, the world of rodeo had become increasingly masculine and increasingly white. Some small towns avoided professional rodeo altogether, constructing images for themselves that directly countered those of pro rodeo. When Williams Lake went professional, the Anahim Lake Rodeo advertised itself with the slogan “the west just got wilder,” signalling that the efforts of pro rodeo organizations to make the sport respectable were not without detractors.

Some Aboriginal cowboys also challenged the idea that pro rodeo in Canada had created a competitive world that was free of discrimination. They started their own organizations and continued to stage rodeos on reserves. The Indian rodeo circuit developed much more along the lines of the pro rodeo cowboy organizations; indeed, the Aboriginal cowboys who formed it came from the ranks of the professional circuit, adapted the CPRA rulebook, and governed reserve rodeos with the same rules. In these last two chapters, we watch the contact zone that was rodeo fragment as professional, small-town, and reserve rodeos celebrated very different communities.

The Whispering Pines Rodeo that I attended in June 2004 was a reserve rodeo held in honour of National Aboriginal Achievement Day. The arena, grandstand, chutes, and corrals were all built by Aboriginal labour as part of a larger plan to provide economic opportunities on the reserve. Yet on that day, under the hot southern Interior sun, settlers and Aboriginal people competed against each other and combined in teams for roping. Husbands and wives, fathers and sons rode and roped together. And when I interviewed Secwepemc elder and rodeo veteran Pete “Duke” LeBourdais, he told me of men from all across southern Alberta and BC, both Aboriginal and settler, who competed against each other, got into trouble together, travelled alongside each other with their families, and raised children on the rodeo circuit of the mid-twentieth century. For him, instances of camaraderie among rodeo people were not fleeting moments of encounter but the core of a life spent rodeoing in the Canadian West.





MAP 2 Communities in British Columbia that had rodeos. Locations in the far southeast of the province appear in Map 3.



MAP 3 Communities in Alberta that had rodeos.

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2029 West Mall

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