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6-21-1983

The Most Renowned Pro-Rodeo Stock Contractors

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Recommended Citation

Beutler, Randy, "The Most Renowned Pro-Rodeo Stock Contractors" (1983). *Faculty Articles & Research*. 2. https://dc.swosu.edu/cas_ss_articles/2

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A modern-generation Beutler tells an interesting story about pro-rodeo.

The Most Renowned Pro-Rodeo Stock Contractors

— by Randy Beutler

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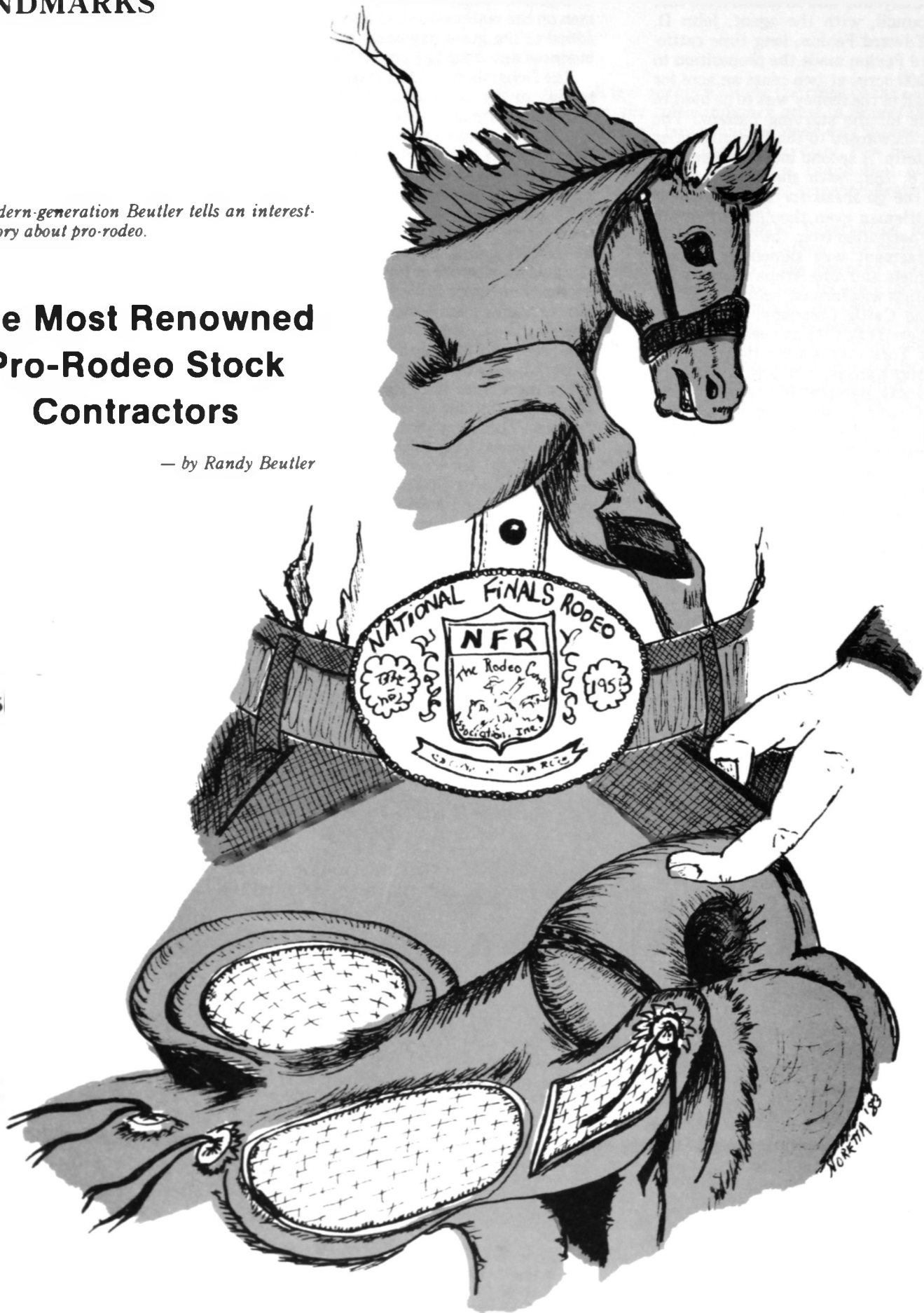


ILLUSTRATION BY NORETTA WILLIAMS

In 1897, Cheyenne, Wyoming held its first Frontier Days celebration and a legend was reborn. It was the legend of the American cowboy, who wrestled calves and broke broncs for a small, measly wage to sustain himself. During the late 1800's, ranch hands competed with one another in the skills they used for a living. But when the open ranges were fenced, the cowhand became a dream that faded into the memory of the public through dime novels and tall tales.

When this cattle drover vanished from the scene, a predecessor remained who kept his spirit alive in a sport to become known as rodeo. Now, this rodeo athlete depends on the stock he draws and abilities he has in either riding, roping, or wrestling an animal for prize money.

The public enjoyed this new, rough sport, and with the request of more rodeos came the demand for more stock. Thus was born the rodeo stock producer, whose roots stem from the old Wild West shows of the turn of the century. He provided the means to have a rodeo and was often as colorful and intriguing as the person who rode the stock.

There have been many great stock producers during the early years of rodeo such as C. B. Irwin, Col. William T. Johnson, Ed McCarthy, and Verne Elliott. But probably the most renowned stock contractors during the building years of pro-rodeo were the Beutler Brothers of Elk City, Oklahoma.

The three members of this famous group consisted of Elra, Jake, and Lynn Beutler. They came from a family of ten children whose parents were John N. and Maggie Beutler.

John Beutler made the land run into Oklahoma in 1889 and settled on a farm west of Okarche. While there, he farmed wheat and hauled cedar posts for a living. On October 19, 1897, Elra was born on this farm; and six years later on February 23, Jake was born.

In 1903, John moved his family to a ranch five miles north of present-day Elk City. Here on January 17, 1905, Lynn was born. During this time John farmed wheat, but mostly dealt in trading cattle and horses.

The Beutlers' rodeo interest was sparked in 1922 when Lynn attended his first rodeo at Canadian, Texas. He decided then that he would rather be an arena director than President of the United States.

The three brothers entered the rodeo business in 1929, when they were asked to provide ten of their bucking horses, which they used on the farm, for the Clinton rodeo. They trailed the horses to Clinton and back for \$150, which was a large amount of money during the depression.

In 1934, the city of El Reno held an '89er celebration and rodeo. The Beutler Brothers got the contract to provide the stock and thus launched their careers in the rodeo business.

The Beutlers got their first "big" contract in 1935, when they supplied stock for the Oklahoma State Fair in Oklahoma City. That same year they also sent stock to the Tri-State Fair in Amarillo, Texas. Both rodeos were a week long and brought in good money to the newly started rodeo company.

After these rodeos, the Beutlers built up their reputation for fine stock and received contracts for rodeos in towns such as Cleo Springs, Woodward, Guymon, Buffalo, Mangum, and Elk City.



PHOTO — PROPERTY OF RANDY BEUTLER

The Beutler Brothers — Elra, Jake, and Lynn

LANDMARKS

Later their rodeos grew to larger and more distant cities like El Paso, Tucson, Albuquerque, Lubbock, Phoenix, Tulsa, North Platte (Nebraska), Vernon (Texas), Monte Vista (Colorado), and Monroe (Louisiana.)

These were very large and popular rodeos, but at this time the largest outdoor rodeo in the United States was the Cheyenne Frontier Days at Cheyenne, Wyoming. It was produced by a former actor in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Verne Elliott. Elliott, otherwise known as "Mr. Rodeo," was one of the largest stock producers in the nation at that time.

Lynn Beutler visited the Cheyenne rodeo every year, and on one such visit in 1952, he learned that Elliott was considering selling out his rodeo company. Lynn talked to Verne, and he struck a deal to buy out the veteran producer for \$65,000.

With the Elliott deal, the Beutler Brothers received contracts for many of Verne's large rodeos like the Fat Stock Show in Fort Worth, Denver's National western Stock Show, and the Cheyenne Frontier Days. This made the Beutlers one of the foremost stock producers in America.

The Beutler Brothers received contracts for many more famous rodeos such as the Snake River Stampede in Nampa, Idaho, the Pikes Peak or Bust Rodeo in Colorado Springs, the Montana State Fair rodeo in Great Falls, and the Tennessee State Fair in Memphis. The brothers kept collecting rodeos until they had twenty-two of the finest shows in the United States.

In February, 1953, while the Beutlers were producing the Tucson rodeo, they signed a contract to provide stock for a movie entitled ARENA. It starred Gig Young, Robert Horton, Barbara Lawrence, and Harry Morgan and was filmed during the Tucson rodeo. The Beutlers were paid \$17,000 for the stock and labor, and they also had a small part in the movie.

Later they also provided stock for the movie BUS STOP with Marilyn Monroe and Don Murray. In 1980, Lynn helped with the rodeo scenes in the comedy STIR CRAZY, starring Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor.

In 1954, Elra left the rodeo company to farm. Lynn and Jake bought out their older brother's share for \$50,000. But, a year later Elra, his son Jiggs, and Buster Morgan formed a stock-producing company which was known as Beutler and Morgan, Rodeo Producers. They produced rodeos under that name until 1959, when Elra and Jiggs bought out Morgan and formed their own rodeo company called Elra Beutler and Son.

Om the late 1950's, Mr. C. A. Reynolds, Chairman of the H. D. Lee Company, and Lynn Beutler devised a plan to enliven and promote professional rodeo. Their idea was to take the top fifteen cowboys in each event and the best stock from the contractors and hold a "world series" of rodeo. The event, which is now known as the National Finals Rodeo, started in 1959, at Dallas, Texas, and has now grown into one of the greatest sporting events

of the year. As former rodeo announcer Pete Pogan wrote in THE WORLD OF RODEO, "It would be entirely fitting and proper to say that Lynn Beutler is the Father of the National Finals Rodeo."

In keeping up their many rodeos, the Beutler Brothers bought most of their bucking stock from stock suppliers and several different rodeo companies throughout the country. On one occasion in 1964, they bought a string of five horses from a stock supplier in Montana. Little did they know at that time that one of these horses, Descent, would become one of the greatest bucking horses in rodeo history. Descent won the "Bucking Horse of the Year" award six times starting in 1966. According to Lynn Beutler, "That's a record that might not be beaten in a long time. I think it will go down in history." Descent is now retired at the Pro-rodeo Hall of Champions in Colorado Springs.

After nearly forty years in the rodeoing business, Jake and Lynn decided to retire in 1967. At this time the Beutler Brothers' company consisted of approximately six hundred head of livestock, eight thousand acres of Western Oklahoma grassland, and some of the finest rodeos in America, including Belle Fourche, South Dakota; Las Vegas, Nevada; and the Texas State Fair at Dallas.

The Beutlers sold their rodeo company to Mike Cervi of Sterling, Colorado, and Harry Vold of De Winton, Alberta, Canada, for approximately a half-million dollars. Jake and Lynn stayed with the new company, which was now known as Beutler Brothers, Vold, and Cervi, for a couple of years to supervise the changeover. Later Vold got out of the merger. When Lynn and Jake sold out, the Beutler Brothers' name stayed with the rodeo company and is today known as Beutler Brothers and Cervi.

Jake Beutler died in March, 1975, after undergoing major surgery. Today Lynn Beutler lives in retirement at his home in Carpenter, north of Elk City.

The rodeo company Elra and Jiggs Beutler started, called Beutler and Son, started out slow, but soon received many nationally known rodeos in towns such as Pampa, Texas; North Platte, Nebraska; Phillipsburg, Kansas; and Burwell, Nebraska.

In 1959, at the age of 65, Elra was chosen as the pickup man for the first National Finals. Seven other people applied for the job and Elra received more votes from the cowboys than the other six persons combined. He was also chosen the next year as pickup man for the 1960 NFR.

Beutler and Son had acquired some of the roughest stock in rodeo at this time. One of their Brahma bulls, Speck, was named "Bucking Bull of the Year" in 1959 and 1960. During Speck's first five years of bucking, he was ridden only once out of 103 tries.

Some famous Beutler and Son saddle broncs have been Tom Dooley; Nowata; Payola; Wild Bill; Short Grass, the 1976 "2nd Bet Saddle Bronc"; and Sam Bass, the 1973 "Bucking Horse of the Year."

Elra and Jiggs expanded to larger and better rodeos in cities like Galveston, New Orleans, Austin, The Astrodome in Houston, the Cow Palace in San Francisco, San Antonio, Lubbock, and Honolulu.

Besides producing several rodeos in different states, Beutler and Son have also contracted many Oklahoma rodeos such as the Oklahoma State Fair rodeo; the Rodeo of Champions in Elk City; the Woodward Elks Rodeo; the Hinton Rodeo; the Pioneer Rodeo in Chickasha; the Tulsa State Fair Rodeo; and the 101 Memorial Rodeo in Ponca City.

Bennie Beutler, Jiggs' son, joined Beutler and Son in the early 1970's. He was the third generation member of this company.

On January 20, 1980, Jiggs was injured in a farm equipment accident. He died the next day in an Oklahoma City hospital at the age of 55. He had served as a paratrooper during World War II in the famed 82nd Airborne Division.

Elra had still been active with the rodeo company at the time of Jiggs' death. He then gradually turned the reins of the company over to Bennie, his grandson.

At the age of 85 and with over fifty years in the rodeo business, Elra was inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame's Rodeo Hall of Fame in December 1982. He now lives in retirement on his farm north of Elk City.

Today many large rodeos are still produced with stock under the Beutler name — a name which is associated with some of the finest rodeos and roughest bucking stock in professional rodeo history.