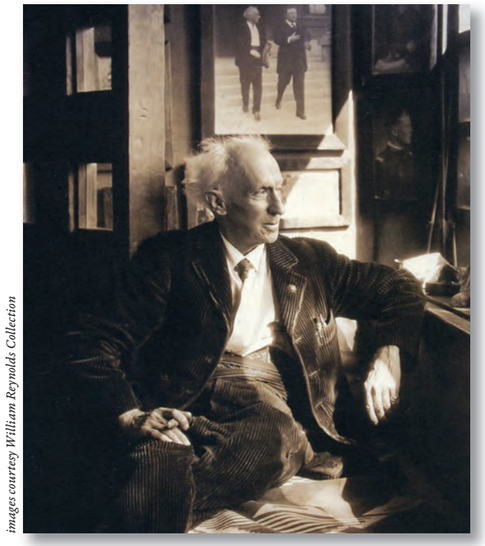
Lummis, Borein and *The Land of Sunshine*

By Bill Reynolds

In 1894, while working as a *vaquero* on Santa Barbara's Rancho Jesus Maria, a young Ed Borein (1872 – 1945) was persuaded into sending some of his sketches to Charles F. Lummis (1859 –1928). Lummis was the Southwest's renaissance man, helping to keep the region's romantic Spanish influence alive through a variety of creative efforts. One was publishing a little magazine that celebrated California and the West, called *The Land Of Sunshine*. No one was more surprised than Borein when he received $15.00 for the drawings. Lummis would later write regarding these first drawings, "Way back in '94 a bashful vaquero up on the 45,000 acre Jesus Maria Ranch, began sending my magazine pen drawings of cowpunchers and cattle. They had the mystery of a pie plate looked squarely in the face, but there was something about them. I suggested to this young man that he soak these animals, split them from one another and let in some air between; and it would be better to have the distant ones not much larger than the ones in front. He was an obliging lad and let me have my way. But what warmed me to him was that he had a conscience. Expect that in a cowboy, but in an artist?"



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Charles F. Lummis

Lummis followed through and used a number Borein's drawings in his magazine and the two would go on to be close friends.

An equally unique individual is Flora Haines Loughead who wrote the story that carried Borein's first drawings. Loughead (1855-1943) was a woman ahead of her time. She was a journalist, married three times, had five children by two husbands, worked her own mining claims, farmed thirty-five acres, wrote many articles, short stories and more than a dozen books. Today, she is probably best remembered as the "Mother of Lockheed Corporation."

Her first marriage to architect Charles E. Aponnyi ended in divorce after years of physical abuse. The marriage yielded three children, May Hope, Victor Rudolph and John Haines, who died as an infant. In 1886 she married John Loughead (pronounced Lockheed), who adopted the children. Loughead was of Scots-Irish descent, the name indicating that his family lived at the head of a lake. John and Flora had two sons, Malcolm and Allan. Her third husband was David A. Gutierrez, of whom little is known.

In 1902, Flora moved the children, without her husband, to a thirty-five-acre ranch near Alma, California where she raised grapes, prunes and other fruits.

At the turn of the century, making a living on a ranch of this size was difficult, so she began writing feature articles for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Sunset* magazine – an opportunity that led her to meeting Charles Lummis and Edward Borein. She also embarked on a successful book-writing career, writing both fiction and nonfiction. Her novels included *The Man Who Was Guilty, The Black Curtain,* and *The Abandoned Claim* – the last one a children's book featuring a girl heroine named "Hope" after her daughter. She had a scientific as well as a domestic bent, writing *The Natural Sciences* and *Quick Cooking*, the latter dedicated to "busy housewives."

Edward Borein

In 1912, her sons Allan and Malcolm Loughead founded the Alco Hydro-Aeroplane Company. This company was renamed the Loughead Aircraft Manufacturing Company and located in Santa Barbara, California. In 1926, following the failure of Loughead, Allan Loughead formed the Lockheed Aircraft Company (the spelling was changed to match its phonetic pronunciation) in Hollywood, California. In 1929 Lockheed sold out to Detroit Aircraft Corporation. In her eighties and living alone, Flora returned to mining and prospected for opals in mines near the Nevada-California border until her death in 1943.

The story she wrote for *The Land of Sunshine* in the August, 1896 edition was titled simply, *The Old California Vaquero* and is a charming explanation of the ways and lore of these "curious" yet highly skilled horsemen.

Flora Haines Loughead

The Old California Vaquero

By Flora Haines Loughead

Clad in short jacket and slashed trousers of velvet, glittering with buttons of silver or gold, broidered waistcoat, gay silken sash, steeple-crowned hat, soft leather *botas* embroidered in fancy patterns; with great silver spurs, a silver-mounted bridle, a Spanish bit (framed in silver) fretting the mouth of his untamed steed, silver-mounted saddle of leather wrought by hand with many a fantastic and beautiful device, on which he sat as never sat king upon his throne – the California vaquero of the olden time was a sight to rejoice the eye on fiesta days.

Yet those who saw him at his best beheld him when he had discarded his festival trappings, and in more sober but no less characteristic garb, demonstrated his superb horsemanship, his wonderful agility, his splendid courage and endurance at the *rodeo*. In those times great bands of wild cattle, thousands upon thousands, roamed the valleys, and twice a year vaqueros went out to round up the stock, brand the young calves, and perchance "cut out" a certain number of steers for slaughter. The world has never witnessed horsemanship surpassing that of the California vaquero. The cowboys of Arizona and New Mexico today perhaps equal him in hardihood and skill; but only one trained to sit a horse from infancy can ride with the unconscious grace, the matchless ease, of the Spanish-American. Flying like the whirlwind over the valleys, racing up and down the steep hillsides, plunging down crumbling barrancas, tearing through chaparral, wherever the maddened cattle sought to escape, there followed the vaquero. There was reason for the *armas* or apron of leather or hide; there was reason for the *chaparrejas* or legging of hide, reaching from ankle to waist, never-falling adjuncts to his working costume. No cloth ever woven in a loom could withstand the raking thorns of chaparral, in these wildest of cross-country rides.

When the scattered herd was finally brought together ("bunched," in the frontier parlance) the serious work of the *rodeo* began. Like flying serpents the long reatas whirled through the air, settling, with unerring precision, upon their appointed victims. The terrified animal would make one fierce spring for freedom, the coil would tighten, horse and rider moving with one impulse in opposite directions; the sturdy little broncos brace themselves for the strain, the reatas pull taught, and the ensnared animal falls.

The impression has gone abroad that the California vaquero was a man set apart for this especial work. In fact, every gentleman was presumed to be able to act as vaquero. It is of course true that every wealthy old Don, in the days before the Gringo came, had upon his estate men who were more capable than their fellows in this particular vocation. But the company which set out was largely made up of volunteers, and these volunteers came from the most aristocratic families. Gay young cavaliers of the day, men who were counted well educated and accomplished, by the acquirements and opportunities of the time, were only too eager to put their physical prowess and equestrian skill to the proof on such occasions. The California vaquero was no stupid, dull-witted, uneducated peon, who worked under orders or for hire, but a daring, ambitious fellow, who no doubt welcomed this rebound from an aimless though delightful social life.

In work of this nature, where so much depends upon instant and certain action, a rider's equipment becomes of paramount importance. Hence it was that the vaquero's bridle and saddle, although fashioned with the rude facilities of the day, serve still as models for the control of a spirited horse, and to insure the ease and safety of a rider. The so-called Spanish bit, in universal use by the Spanish-Californian, and which has so often been denounced for its cruelty, has in reality often saved the lives of rider and horse, and no native pony, bred to its use, is happy without it. Like all good things, its use may be abused, but employed as a severe check only in case of genuine emergency, and for the most part left to rest loosely in the animal's mouth, the latter receiving its direction by the touch of the reins on the neck, it is no more uncomfortable than a heavy curved bar of steel sawing the mouth. Indeed, the ingenious artificer strung large metallic beads along the frame, and it was the olden custom to place in the hollow space in the center a small lump of salt, so that the untrained colt would learn to rub his tongue against the bit and roll the little copper rings in his effort to reach the delicate saline

morsel. The habit, once formed, is persistent, and the bronco's pretty custom of tossing his head and apparently champing at the bit when standing, is merely an evidence of the power of habit. The vaquero saddle is of necessity ponderous, to withstand the strain that comes upon the reata, wound around the horn, when it tightens upon the struggling steer. But they were not capable of pure utilitarianism in any direction, those light-hearted, beauty-loving old Californians! Hence it is that the old saddles were frequently masterpieces of ornamentation, exquisite devices being wrought by hand upon the leather, the horn being fashioned into fantastic and artistic shapes, while gold or silver mounters frequently contributed to the outward splendor. In one well verified instance an old Don actually had his saddle-tree constructed of gold. The magnificence of these old saddles did not always strictly comport with the estate of their owners. I think it is Ross Browne, the most charming narrator among all California's host of early writers, who alludes to the richly attired horsemen, with spirited steed, and rich trappings, who often had not the price of a single meal in his pocket.[1] Work of this sort is not calculated to

[1] Why should he? Meals did not need to be bought, in that patriarchal time.

develop a considerate spirit in man toward the beast. Ten-year-old boys found amusement in stationing themselves outside of corrals as the wild cattle rushed out, escaping from unused restraint, when by a dexterous movement they grasped fleeing steers by the tail, and spurring their horses forward flung the cattle literally tail over head. To perform this feat adroitly, successfully, was the height of a lad's ambition. Every other consideration was sacrificed to the one accomplishment of skillful horsemanship.

With the intrusion of civilization and the growth of villages and cities, the old-time vaquero is passing away. When the Americans, who now have possession of all the land, give their great flower festivals in our Southern California towns, they usually introduce upon their program a field day of athletic sports, and one of their widely advertised features is in true circus style:

"Breaking and riding of broncos which have never known bridle or saddle. Lassooing and throwing of wild cattle! By the celebrated old-time vaqueros Romero, Vasquez, Dominguez, Garcia" – and the like.

A half dozen sad-looking elderly men ride into the arena. Two or three of the number are clad in quaint costumes, a trifle moth-eaten, it may be, and with tarnished buttons, taken from old inlaid chests, where a few relics of the past have been preserved, in spite of woe and want and the bribes of the curio seekers; but they ride, for the most part, in every day costumes, much the worse for age and wear. The stamped leathers of their saddles are dark with age, and their mounts, well trained although they be, have the same meager, out-of-date look as their masters. An untamed colt, from one of the mountain ranchos, bursts into the ring, terrified at the sight of the circle of staring faces and the shouts that greets him. There are a few graceful turns around the cramped arena, reatas flash through the air, and the frightened beast is snared and thrown. He is saddled and bridled. An old man springs upon his back and keeps his seat as the animal plunges madly about the arena, bucking with every leap; spurs and lash are freely applied, and after a few brisk rounds the rebellious spirit is curbed, and the animal canters peaceably, to the accompaniment of mild applause. Other unruly animals are driven into the ring and brought under subjection. Lastly a handful of gold pieces is tossed upon the ground. The vaqueros, riding at a slow gallop, and without any unseemly greed, lean from the saddle and pick them up. They cannot refuse the coins, nor cavil at manner of their earning, for they sorely need them; but I suspect they agree beforehand to divided them equally, and this explains the total absence of striving. Then they ride slowly from the ring, without once bestowing a single look upon the spectators. This is the tragic feature of our gay fiestas, could people but know it.

The skilled vaquero did not always confine his operations to horned cattle. One aged man, Jose Antonio Ruiz, tells an amusing tale of how he started out on the Conejos Rancho, one morning sixty years ago, and riding ahead of his companion came unexpectedly upon two grizzlies taking a matutinal stroll. One was a monstrous fellow, and opened its huge jaws with such snarl that Ruiz concluded to let it pass unchallenged; but he cast his reata over the smaller bear and tightened the noose about the animal's neck. Here arose a dilemma. He could not dispatch the animal without leaving his horse, and thus giving the creature more or less leeway, when the chances would be about even for beast and man in a hand-to-hand tussle. So he dragged the grizzly back and forth, choking it until his companion finally came up and dispatched the big game with his knife.

Santa Barbara county possesses one pure and undegenerate survival of the old-time vaquero, in the person of Ramon Ortega, who has retreated before the encroachments of civilization, and today, in dignity and solitary independence, lives the life he loves, in the fastnesses of the San Rafael range. Ramon Ortega is the man who has lassooed no less than half a dozen grizzlies, his own approved method of dealing with this ferocious beast. He dwells in one of the wildest localities known within the State – a last stronghold of the grizzly bear, and where mountain lions and coyotes are as common as dogs in the populous valley below. The great condor builds its nests in the cliffs of the San Rafael, and you may travel for a day and a night along the trails and see no print of a white man's foot. Ramon Ortega is an old man, but big and stalwart, and the best guide in all this wild mountain region, although he has never been known to compromise his dignity by speaking a word of English. When the young Englishmen who have squatted on cattle ranges in the vicinity find their herds getting inextricably mixed, they usually send for old Ramon, who forthwith organizes a band of expert horsemen of his own race and himself takes the field with them, never leaving until the missing cattle have been found and rounded up and parted upon their several reservations. But if he ever accepts compensation for such service, it is through some third party.

In Santa Barbara the braiding or weaving of the reata is by no means a lost art. Several old Mexicans earn a precarious living by means of this ingenious handiwork. Indeed, their annual output far exceeds the consumption of the market, in spite of the demands of aspiring young tenderfeet from beyond the Rockies, who do not consider that they are properly equipped to ride down State street without immense *tapaderos* of stamped leather, clanking spurs and a reata coiled below their saddle horn.

These reata-makers are for the most part aged men with a look of true gentility in their grave faces, and present a pathetic sight as they stroll along the curb, courteously calling the attention of strangers to their wares. They work for the most part in the privacy of their homes, but in the bar patio of one shabby cottage on Chapala street the entire process of reata manufacture may be observed. A fat, one-legged Mexican of middle age may be seen, sometimes cutting the narrow strips from the hide in an endless ribbon, following round and round the margin in a spiral curve, until the center is reached. Then he fastens the long strands to a fence post, and deftly manipulates the bobbins on which they are wound. The reata often extends the entire length of the dooryard before the end is reached.