

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

1996

## Review of *Cowboys and Kansas: Stories from the Tallgrass Prairie* By Jim Hoy

Timo Heiskanen  
*University of Helsinki*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Heiskanen, Timo, "Review of *Cowboys and Kansas: Stories from the Tallgrass Prairie* By Jim Hoy" (1996).  
*Great Plains Quarterly*. 1135.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1135>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

*Cowboys and Kansas: Stories from the Tallgrass Prairie.* By Jim Hoy. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. Introduction, illustrations, indexes. xvi + 226 pp. \$22.95.

Do you think of cowboys when you think of Kansas? Few people do, but Jim Hoy, English professor and Kansas native and patriot, has set out to give the Kansas cowboy his rightful place in the history, arguably, of America's greatest folk hero. Hoy's main concern in *Cowboys and Kansas* is the real working cowboy, though he also touches upon the importance of the *mythic* cowboy on the American psyche. Both are genuine articles, although the two have little in common.

*Cowboys and Kansas* is divided into seven parts. The first two discuss the history of the cowboy and relate stories of individual Kansas cowboys, cattle traders, ranch owners, and rodeo champions of both the past and present. Part three is dedicated to cowgirls who have left their mark from rodeos to ranches. Hoy tells us the first cowgirl, Willie Matthews, came from Kansas. Part four is concerned with animals. Often they are real individualists, and cowboys have to know their every mood to manage them properly. Part five considers the cowboy's labor. The job demands a vast variety of skills from roping and riding to counting cattle. Often the work is tiresome but sometimes it is a real adventure. In part six Hoy deals with cowboys at play. His discussion includes cowboy poetry and storytelling, horse races, roping contests, and ranch rodeos. The book's final section is dedicated to cow-

boy equipment and clothes. The cowboy often puts great stock on his looks, accepting only certain brands of clothing. The first cowboy boots, the Hyer boots, incidentally, originated in Kansas.

*Cowboys and Kansas* is based upon personal interviews and experiences. The Hoy family's cowboy traditions go back generations, and Jim Hoy himself worked as a cowboy. He has talked with scores of old timers and contemporary cowboys and delved deeply into cowboy history.

The volume is engagingly written, combining factual accounts of cowboy culture with stories and legends. Among its most appealing stories is that of Hoy's Uncle Frank, whose middle finger was allegedly shot off by one of the infamous Dalton brothers. Sometimes the book is a bit repetitive, such as its continual insistence that Kansas is an important cowboy state; and it does lack a bibliography. But overall, *Cowboys and Kansas* makes both informative and entertaining reading.

TIMO HEISKANEN  
Department of English  
University of Helsinki, Finland